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Editorial

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption in human history. India, with the world's second largest population has been hit hard by it. This pandemic has created a setback in all sectors and the sector of education is no exception. Since the academic scenario has considerably altered in the last one year, arranging. Editing and publishing a journal was not an easy task. We, the editorial team of *Sāhitya*, too had to struggle much to put together an issue on time. We apologize to our readers for the delay, but we also hope that they will understand the peculiarity of the situation and hence be considerate. We hope that this issue will bring a ray of happiness to our erudite readers.

This issue of *Sāhitya* also brings with it happy news for its readers as the newly formed editorial board has taken an important decision of publishing the journal twice a year from now on. This decision is taken keeping in mind that it will provide more opportunities to the scholars of comparative literature to publish with *Sāhitya*, as such we hope to cover broader and emerging trends in comparative literature thus providing our readers a broader spectrum of study. This issue presents a varied range of articles pertaining to different alleys of Comparative Literature. Arnapurna Rath and Sura P. Rath has presented a magnificent comparative study on the fictional writings by women writers of 19th and 20th Century which provides a close reading of the figures of rumour mills and gossip in the households of the *Raj*. María Luisa Rodríguez Muñoz's paper takes up the analysis of the translation of culturemes in the French and American versions of Mario Vargas Llosas's text with reference to the different spaces of the versions in their historical context is an important contribution to translation and comparative literature studies. Based on the semiotic grid of Juri Lotman, Arikam Chatterjee looks at the tantric corpus vis-a-vis Mahanirvana Tantra referring back to the first translation of tantric text into English. The article by Sambhabi Ghosh beautifully brings out communication that happens through the language of food and symbolic cannibalism in the process of understanding such communication which is an important contribution around food culture and the communication established through eating. Sounak Das's article claims to understand the ontological nature of worldliness through the critical evaluation of world literature as a challenging category and contrasted it with the notion of comparative literature. Paulomi Sharma's article traces the theme of corporeality in the writings of Mahasweta Devi. In her attempt she reads the original Bengali text of Mahasweta Devi to study how the author uses language to disrupt the conventional use of it.

— Jatindra Kumar Nayak.

**Rumour, Gossip, and Loneliness:
the *Nautch-Girl* and her *Other* in *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* and *The
Woman in the Bazaar***

Arnapurna Rath¹

Sura P. Rath²

Abstract:

This paper is a culmination of an elaborate study on the fictional writings by women authors from the British Raj in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The present study follows a close-reading and comparative study of two novels written by two women authors from the British Raj – Frank Penny’s (1867-1934) *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* (1898), and Alice Perrin’s (1847-1939) *The Woman in the Bazaar* (1914). The paper provides a reflective analysis of subversive domesticity through a study of the tropes of rumour mills and gossip in the households of the Raj through a close-reading of the two novels. The paper makes an argument that the novels demand a *humane* reading, empathetic to the cause of the woman (whether the native or the colonizer). The excess of rumour, gossip, and a certain mystery that surrounded these women characters like Minachee, Deva, and Rafella in the novels lead to their ultimate fall. The “exoticization” of a woman can be mentally and emotionally draining as is demonstrated by the characters of these novels. The novels highlight complexities in the lives women both in the empire and in their colonies. These characters in the novels are pushed into loneliness, isolation, and into extreme steps of prostitution. The women characters may either represent the colonized spaces or may belong to the spaces of the imperial powers, yet the challenges of subversive domesticity and the need to balance the expectations of the family and the empire, can emotionally drain any woman – whether she is a European courtesan or an Indian Devadasi. These novels hold a key to counter-reading of grand narratives of colonial discourses in the light of the contemporary times. The emotive terrains of women, their biological setup, and the demand for them to perform in certain ways in the socio-cultural systems of their own cultures, might be universal in some ways and maybe counterproductive to the well-being of any woman irrespective of their racial identities. Through a reading of these novels, we argue that literary history and criticism could treat these women protagonists and women authors of the Raj with more compassion than they were treated in the last century, after the memories of both the colonial and the post-colonial times have subsided in the fine pixels of the collective unconscious of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Narratives, Gossip, Rumour, Women’s Novels, Colonial Politics, *Memsahibs*, Raj Fiction, Modernity, Tradition, Devadasis, Comparative Literature

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Between the Bungalow and the Brothel

The position of women in the South-Asian literary traditions is complex -- largely connected to the historical-cultural processes that have evolved through the centuries of colonial and postcolonial traditions. This study focuses on a close-reading of two novels written by women authors from the British Raj – Frank Penny’s (1867-1934) *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* (1898), and Alice Perrin’s (1847-1939) *The Woman in the Bazaar* (1914).¹ The attempt is to understand the tacit connection between colonial politics, the narratives that surround women protagonists, and the issues of gender in the fictional writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through a reading of these texts. The two novels selected for this study are based on women protagonists and the narration is by women authors of the British Raj. These novels demand a *humane* reading, sensitive to the cause of women in the colonial narratives of the nineteenth and early twentieth century -- whether they are native or are a part of the colonizer’s supremacy. Women across colour and racial demarcations faced violence, and were subjected to alienation during the colonial era. This paper tries to critically evaluate the nuances of fictional texts written by women authors of the Raj, beyond the obvious parameters of reading these fictions based on the Oriental/Occidental grand-narrative.² We intend to present these authors and their characters as highly complex, possessing an ambivalent outlook towards the colonizer-colonized, ruler-subject binaries of their times. The subversive “politics of domesticity” in the colonial setup, is far more intricate when it comes to these lesser-known stories of the women authors. Their stories remain buried in the metaphorical sands of Time. These novels have been lost under the carpet of colonial legacy, being mentioned only on rare occasions as “minor” voices in literature. A corpus of writings by the women writers of the Raj went into complete oblivion while some of the writings of their male contemporaries have survived through centuries.

The paper provides a reflective analysis of subversive domesticity through a study of the tropes of rumour mills and gossip in the households of the Raj through a reading of *The Romance of a Nautch-Girl* and *The Woman in the Bazaar*. Through the tropes of gossip, rumour mills and their connection to alienation and loneliness in the fictional texts, the attempt is to focus on the complex nature of human relationship that challenge the simplistic binaries of colonizer/colonized model. The study argues that a subliminal nexus between gossip, rumour, and loneliness (stereotypes ascribed to female characters of the modernist

sensibilities of twentieth century) have a subtle role to play in the shaping of perception and image building of these women protagonists and their authors. These novels reveal multifaceted layers of *in-betweenness* of being the Victorian “good wife”, the *Memsahib*, the European “madame”, *vis-à-vis* the “native” Indian woman domestic subject, such as the nautch-girl, and the Devadasis. These character “types” found in the novels not only make the tales gripping, replete with constructed Oriental eroticism, but they also provide a glimpse into the liminal spaces of domesticity and their connection to the larger politics of the Raj. The voices of the European women authors of the Raj reflect an “ambivalence” bordering on resistance towards the machinations of the Raj (Ramusack&Burton 472).³

In these spaces of being the British wife, the *Memsahib*, and the Indian wife-subject, there is also the “in-between” space inhabited by the “native prostitute” (courtesans and Devadasis as denominated in these writings) which are explored through the fiction of these women writers. The body of the “other” (the native woman courtesan) was a receptacle for disease and death, and the effect of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was massive on both Indian and British women. Subject of sexuality was firmly pushed into the liminal spaces of the “home” and into the “sanctified” bed of matrimony and racial hierarchy after the Indian mutiny. As per Victorian standards, European “white” women were expected to epitomize chastity and carry the legacy of the empire forward. Indian women were doubly colonized, by imperial authority as well as by their domestic circumstance of physical and psychological exploitation. In “Imperial Geographies of Home” Alison Blunt remarks on the significance of “legitimizing” the home in the expansion of the Raj: “British homes in the empire could only be established and maintained as ‘legitimate and natural’ when they housed British wives and mothers” (Blunt 421-422). The *Memsahib* had to adhere to the roles of being “good wives” and these were reinforced through structured lifestyle as well as unstructured role-plays of gossip and rumour.

In this process of legitimizing gender roles, the empire had to construct a series of “otherness” by relegating certain professions such as the courtesans to the category of “prostitution”, generating further stigma for the women practitioners of these vocations. Penny’s *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* narrates the story of Devadasis through the characters of Minachee and her mother Deva who had to go through a difficult transition from being the “wives of the gods” to deteriorating into challenging times when the local Zamindar

discarded them for younger *Dasis*, and when the curious British men such as William started to meddle with local customs and rituals of Chengalem. Perrin's *The Woman in the Bazaar* is a narration of the tragic fate of Rafella Forte who marries Captain Coventry and moves to India from a British countryside. She becomes the target of unkind gossip and extreme restrictions of her husband. This ultimately drives her into taking up prostitution in the Indian bazaars. While Minachee is an "Indian" courtesan, Rafella is a European girl who is forced into prostitution, serving native Babus and lives a tragic destiny.

Stephen Legg in "Stimulation, Segregation, Scandal" argues that the process of segregation of the cantonment and the native settlements was a kind of "spatial and governmental mind set" (Legg 1462) and that the prime function of the governments during Raj was to protect the military regiments from venereal disease (Legg 1461). This led to isolation and alienation of both the settlers as well as the natives, leading them into suspicion of one another. Harald Fischer-Tiné argues that European women's prostitution was suppressed because they were seen as "eroding native respect for the ruling class" (Fischer-Tiné 165). These women characters, the European women courtesan/prostitutes could only be located in the pages of novels and as 'gossip' figures in the circle of the *memshaibs* in the cantonment clubs. In the major ports of entry in India like Bombay and Calcutta, there is an intricate connection between body and the politics of the Raj; "Since 'blood and sex' were regarded as important markers of difference between rulers and colonial subjects,' these contradictions become perhaps most obvious in the case of the European prostitutes plying their trade in British India" (Fischer-Tiné 165). The European women pushed into prostitution as well as the Indian nautch girls were relegated to the footnotes of colonial fiction and to the annotations of uncharted histories.

Gossip and the Untranslatable in *The Romance of a Nautch Girl*

Mrs. Frank Penny's novel *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* (1898)⁴ is the story of a British civil surgeon and his encounter with cultural customs in the Southern part of India through the Devadasis of a local temple in Chengalem. Penny's *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* focuses on the complex relationships between British officers and a special class of Indian women called the *Devadasis*. The story focuses on untranslatability of indigenous customs and traditions, bordering on dangerous consequences for those Europeans who tried transgressing

native rituals. The trope of “gossip” plays an important role in the narrative loop of the text. Gossip works as tool to subvert the role of Indian Devadasis and to create a suspicion in the minds of the colonial masters regarding these women dancers who are looked with suspicion due to their adherence to certain rituals and traditions.⁵ The casual gossip regarding the Devadasis in the novel lead to tragic consequences in the lives of the characters.

The geographical landscape in Penny’s novels are distinct when compared to her contemporaries like Flora Annie Steel (who has been by far the most acknowledged woman writer of the time). Penny wrote forty-six novels during her life, mostly covering the landscape of Deccan and the Malabar regions where she spent most of her life. Srilekha Bell in her paper “Mrs. Frank Penny’s *A Mixed Marriage*” provides a lucid biographical sketch of Penny.⁶ Penny’s novels like *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* and *A Mixed Marriage* (1903), present complex gender roles in the Indo-British ties. She provides a keen insight into the domestic spaces of Indian households as well as the British cantonment.

The Romance of a Nautch Girl highlights the various shades of relationship between the *Devadasi* Meenachi and her mother Deva, a British doctor Felix Manning, and his brother William Manning. The novel starts with Felix Manning, the Civil Surgeon of “Chengalem, in the Tinnevely district of South India” (11) searching for his brother William, who seems to have gone missing from the town after witnessing a local ritual in the form of a ‘Devil-Dance’. Penny draws her characters in this novel from the service group that worked for the empire such as doctors and police officers. This novel deals with human relationships within the British community, highlighting the dangers of rumour mills when they spread between two disparate cultures of the Britishers and the Indians. The story also narrates the tension between the two Manning brothers when Beryl Holdsworth, a British girl in the community gets attracted to the younger brother William. Thus, it has both inter-cultural and intra-cultural tales as the crux of the narrative. William’s curiosity and his keen interest into the customs and traditions of the “natives” of Chengalem form the subtext of the novel. William mysteriously disappeared from the medical quarters after witnessing a sacrificial night, a dense ritual that involved sacrificing animals to propitiate the goddess by the natives of Chengalem. His elder brother, Felix Manning harbours a suspicion that the *dasis* of the local temple are somehow connected (“involved”) with the disappearance of his brother from the seclusion of the cantonment area.

The opening page has a sketch of a handmade map of Chengalem (Illustration1) clearly showing the strict lines of demarcation between cantonment and Indian settlements within the town. These demarcations between the cantonment and the “native” Indian houses needed to be respected. The characters in the novel could observe one another from a distance, but they had an unspoken pact of keeping their distance from the customs and traditions of the “other”. However, both Manning brothers somehow transgress this unspoken sacrosanct demarcation between the natives and the colonizers. William violates the demarcation because of his curiosity for native rituals and cultures of the temple. Felix, on the other hand violates the demarcations owing to his responsibility as the local medical doctor.

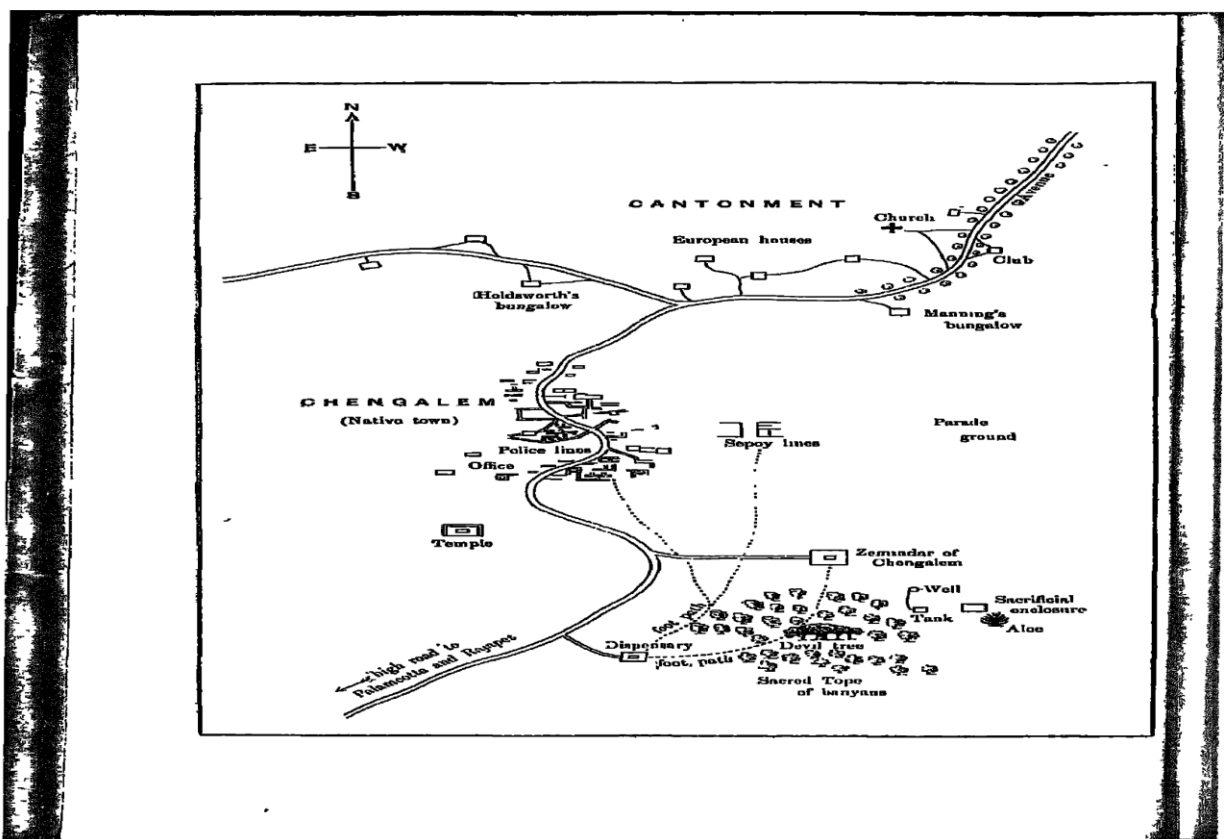


Illustration 1: A map drawn by F.E. Penny at the onset of the novel. The town has clearly two clusters of “native” houses and “European” houses that demonstrate the cultural and social lines of demarcation.

While there is an interest to learn about each other's cultures and social practices, it was also expected that the colonizer and the colonized maintain a respectable distance. The affairs of the Chengalem temple and its resident Devadasis, for instance, generates an interest for the "exotic" Indian women among the British officers. However, transgressing the unseen boundaries could spell trouble for both communities, as it happens in the case of William. A particular character Major Brett, who is a friend and confidante of the Manning brothers, conveys this clear sense of distrust of the natives among the British officers; "He disliked and distrusted natives, and was too often obliged in his capacity, to study the worst side of their nature" (61).

The lack of understanding of customs and rituals of devadasis and a severe lack of empathy is pronounced as the story unfolds. Deva, the mother of "Dasi" Minachee's reveals the secret of William's death towards the end of the novel stating that he transgressed the demarcations; "He was at the devil-dance that night. He dared to touch the tree, and the spirit drank his blood" (346). She portrays William as an "outsider" and a transgressor who enters into the sacred groves of the belief systems of the Devadasis and infringes their privacy. Their loneliness is a part of their sacred customs and William invades that space and has to pay for his extreme adventure and his lack of understanding of the local customs. Deva is the symbol of a belief system of sacrosanct customs. She is not understood by the White European officers and she too does not understand the sensibilities of William and Felix. These are untranslatable spaces of cultural transactions.

On the other hand, a local Zamindar provides a counter-narrative of William's death to Felix Manning. He recounts the story as narrated by a servant based on a conversation with Minachee's mother: "You do not see the drift of her story. The spirit drank his blood. That is how the people talk of the goats they kill in honour of their swami. I do not believe in these sacrifices. I am an educated man" (346). The Zamindar works for the British officers, and in spite of being a local chieftain plants the seeds of suspicion in the minds of Felix Manning regarding the Dasis. The narratives at both ends of the spectrum of the Dasis and Mannings, are woven by here-say and an assumption that the rituals of the natives have something to with the "lack of education". Gossip becomes the only means of translating the untranslatable layers of the civilized/ savage binaries. The death of William in the novel directly relates to the complex ideological clashes within layers of Indian and European civil society of the

times. William transgresses the boundaries set by the “civilized” society of the British cantonment, and suffers the consequences of his extreme curiosity in the rituals of the natives. He does not understand their customs or their traditions, but he is interested in the untranslatable aspects of the native rituals. William’s death remains a puzzle, while his brother Felix follows the fragments of this puzzle by piecing together conflicting narratives of the British officers and the Devadasis. He forms a collage out of these narratives and creates his version to solve the mystery of the death of his brother. Rumour and gossip within the cantonment ladies circle and between the local communities of Chengalem are some of his major sources, other than eye-witness accounts. Felix Manning keeps highlighting the unreliability of these narratives in his search for the “truth” and the records tracing his missing brother to the last couple of hours spent with the Devadasis watching their secret ritual.

William and Felix have completely different attitudes. Doctor Felix Manning is presented as a “responsible, hardworking” civil surgeon who tries to help people out from diseases and works on the natives to cure them from “superstitions” like ghosts and demons (there are rampant beliefs in Chengalem of the demon king of the tree); “He loved his profession for itself, and not as a means of filling his money-bags” (310). Felix is a rationalist in his professional disposition, and treats the “natives” with kindness:

He had done well in following the medical profession; success had attended his studies, and he had taken high honours. He loved his work, and was held to be one of the cleverest doctors in the South. It was a good appointment, as there was a great deal of private practice to be had amongst the richer natives; and for this he was eminently suited, as he knew the language thoroughly, and understood the character of the people. (12)

William Manning is a British civilian, not working, financially dependent on his elder brother. He enjoys watching the rituals of the natives, horse-riding, and looking at the flowers of the local temple. He is courting a British girl Beryl Holdsworth, but both Beryl and William keep delaying a discussion about engagement or wedding. Felix is fond of Beryl, but he does not interfere between her and William. In fact, he gets angry at William for delaying the engagement. In the first few chapters of the novel, Penny gives an insight into the well-established social norm that young British girls were sent to India in order to find prospective

matches in the British community of India. As a result, courtship was common in the small towns and within the cantonments. Felix advises William that it is not a gentleman's ideal to make a girl wait: "“I like to take my own time about it”, said Will, shifting uneasily in his chair. He did not relish this cross-questioning at all. “You have been long enough, in all conscience” (20).

The complex network of relationship between William, Felix, and Beryl is the main text of Penny's novel, but the more powerful subtext is the life of *Devadasis* and the attitude of the empire towards this special class of people in Chengalem. The gossip surrounding the lives of these temple dancers, become the staple of the novel. Their rituals, their struggle to remain relevant in a fast changing world, and the exploitation of these girls in the hands of the local Zamindar as well as temple priests are significant tropes of the novel. The native customs and traditions of the *Dasis* are presented through the lenses of the colonizer; “The Hindu with his strange creed and code of morals must ever be an inscrutable being to the Briton and the Briton with his strange Philanthropies equally incomprehensible to the Hindus” (348). In the novel, Felix Manning gathers information regarding Minachee and her mother from the gossip circles of the local Zamindar. He gets to know that the Dasi Minachee and her mother Deva live under constant pressure to be artful and appealing in their demeanour and in their performance. They are constantly under the threat of being replaced by younger, and more beautiful *Dasis*. As a result, Deva (the mother of Minachee) keeps performing rituals and sacrifices to propitiate the local deities so that their profession and their relevance for the Zamindar is retained: “It was quite true that Minachee and her mother had received their dismissal. The evil day had fallen upon them in spite of the pooja, so elaborately carried out in the banyan grove. The new dasi had come; and on her arrival mother and daughter were obliged to go” (93).

When Deva is faced with an imminent criminal proceeding for poisoning the Zamindar's young *dasi* and also for killing William, she is afraid of losing her caste and class with the physical touch of the “white” police, more than the death penalty (354-356) itself. Major Brett warns Felix about Minachee; “Look here, Manning, don't you let that girl hang about you too much. Half our troubles with savage and semi-civilised countries begin with women” (296). Felix treats his subjects with utmost care, but he also fears the “dark” corners of the native world. For example, his preference for Minachee and allowing her to help in the

hospital gives him an illusion of being an “evangelist” to the native world. However, the Indian apothecary who assists Felix in his dispensary is uncomfortable at the doctor’s preference for the Devadasi’s help in his work (236). The framework of patriarchy on both ends of the empire and the colony is complex as depicted in the novel.

The life of a dasi is presented as intricate and is coloured with Oriental hyperbole in the novel. Deva’s description proves the norm of presenting native women in the novels of the time with both hyperbolic exoticism, as well as acute suspicion.

Deva belonged to the class of women known as dasis, who are attached to Hindu temples. They are the wives of the gods, and their profession is dancing amongst other things. At an early age they are married to the idol in the temple; or to some demon supposed to haunt a particular tree. Deva was the wife of the devil in the big banyan tree in the tope. (40)

The native gossip-mongers such as the local Zamindar and the - apothecary narrate in hyperbole to Felix about the excess in jewellery, extravagant sarees, and the silks that are bestowed on *Devadasis* by kings, priests or Zamindars. They also discuss the poverty and infamy that awaits these dasis when they are past their youth and beauty are highlighted. The more vibrant a dasi in her mannerisms, more is the revenue that is generated for the temple through her: “She became the life and soul of each festival. The temple authorities were pleased that it should be so, for it brought them wealth”. (42) The lifestyle of the dasis within the temple premises is described from a European point of view – this does not take into account their devotion or their deep spiritual union with the deities of the temple. The dasis have to live according to the demands of the astute service requirement and that they are initially enlisted to serve as the foremost servants of the gods of the temple. The novel speaks of their modest circumstances of life; being laden with gifts and jewellery only by their “secret admirers”. This adds a mystery to their personalities. They are betrothed to the gods and their life is contingent upon the fame of the temple and the *Zenana* that they serve (133). The novel presents a complex picture of the “local” where gossip mongers and favour seekers have a role to play in the “othering” of the dasis.

The passionate relationship between a dasi and a “white” British colonizer is marred with jealousy and anger at both ends of the ruler and the ruled. The power equation between the native and the colonial authority can be that of pity, empathy, or of kindness, but never

that of an equal. Minachee is envious of the growing intimacy between Beryl and Felix after the disappearance of William. The novelist colours the pages of intimacy between Felix and Minachee with hyperbole. At a juncture in the novel, Felix comes to suddenly realize Minachee's intense love for him when she comes to him in the dispensary in the darkness of the night: "The cold English girl with her barren friendship faded and was lost in the torrid colours. Of the Oriental passion which blazed before his dazzled vision" (315-316).

Penny also underscores the trope of gossip and rumour mills as a psychological feature of the circles of British women in clubhouses and bungalow verandas in *Romance of the Nautch Girl*. While the bazaar was perceived as a space to fear by the white settlers especially the *Memsahibs*, the clubhouses on the other hand, were thought to be positive recreational spaces. The gossip mills in the clubhouses involved man-woman relationships, illicit attractions between the native and the colonizers, and the fates of the newly wed British wife or young unmarried girl in search of a husband in India, in addition to political events like a new officer in the town or change in administration or events like the Indian mutiny. When Beryl Holdsworth comes to live in the town with her mother and she is attracted towards William rather than towards Felix in her initial days at Chengalem, the British officers' wives remark: "It has always surprised me", said her sister, "that Miss Holdsworth should be attracted by the younger brother, instead of the elder" (120). The gossip circles of the wives in the cantonment do affect Beryl and Felix after the disappearance of William, to an extent that Major Brett harbours a suspicion that Felix may have killed his own brother due to his secret admiration for Beryl. Gossip in the clubs of the colonial cantonment is connected with isolated lives that the European wives are subjected to in the small towns and structured cantonment spaces of the British colonies in India. Felix leaves the city of Chengalem after coming to know about his brother's death on the night of the "Devil-dance". The author simply states that Beryl leaves after a few days for England and that Felix gets married to her in England, as if to subscribe to the final moral resolution of the Victorian novels. Felix Manning departs from the town without bitterness for the people; "I am sorry to leave the people. They love me, I know. But their love for me did not save my brother's life..." (357). The novel concludes without a happy ending.

E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924), written much later than *Romance*, narrated overwhelming impressions of Indian rituals on the European settlers. These rituals in

the Marabar caves appalled Adela Quested after which she escaped from the caves thinking an attempt to outrage her modesty was made by Dr. Aziz. Forster discussed the complete lack of perception and the racial opacity between people in India and Britain. Penny also narrates some of these dark spaces of cultures in the form of the life of *Devadasis* and the animal sacrifices that were rampant in nineteenth century India, years before Forster wrote his book. She narrates the rituals in the chapter “A Devil-Dance” as if these events were from a photograph or from a personal experience; “A Devil-Dance of South India is a terrible affair. The unbeliever may smile, but there is no other word for it; it is a terrible affair” (46). The severity of some of the customs prevalent in those times is narrated:

The poojari, holding the sword aloft, ready to strike, watched the animal intently; it did not stir. A second time Deva cast the water upon it from her cupped palms, and the goat shook its head. The sword flashed in the yellow light of the cressets; the head was severed in one blow, and the bleeding body fell to the ground, where it lay in a crimson pool. (50)

An intense sense of alienation and fear of the *other* takes its toll on Beryl, William and Felix. While Beryl survives, but falls sick, William dies under unknown circumstances and is accused of interfering with the rituals of the natives. The important aspect of Penny’s craft is her descriptive style and the fact that she can negotiate with the rituals associated with locals of Deccan, with almost an anthropological clarity. She documents each episode with clear and crisp narration. In the novel, rumour is a pervasive theme, working in the gossip networks of the cantonment and in the circles of the *Devadasis*. It is extreme rumour that indirectly contributes to William’s death in the novel, and it also leads to increase the troubles in the lives of Minachee and her mother Deva. The “untranslatable” nature of rituals and cultural motifs of two different cultures, add to the dense tropes of rumour and miscommunication. Felix is lead into isolation after his brother’s death, his love for the “natives” or his compassion for Minachee could not help him survive in Chengalem. He had to leave for England by the end of the novel. Minachee too disappears while she is being transported to Palamcottah (359). She remains untraceable and disappears towards the end of the narration: “The bird had flown. Minachee had disappeared” (359). The mystery and exoticism in Minachee, the “other woman”, the *Devadasi* remains indefatigable to the end of the novel.

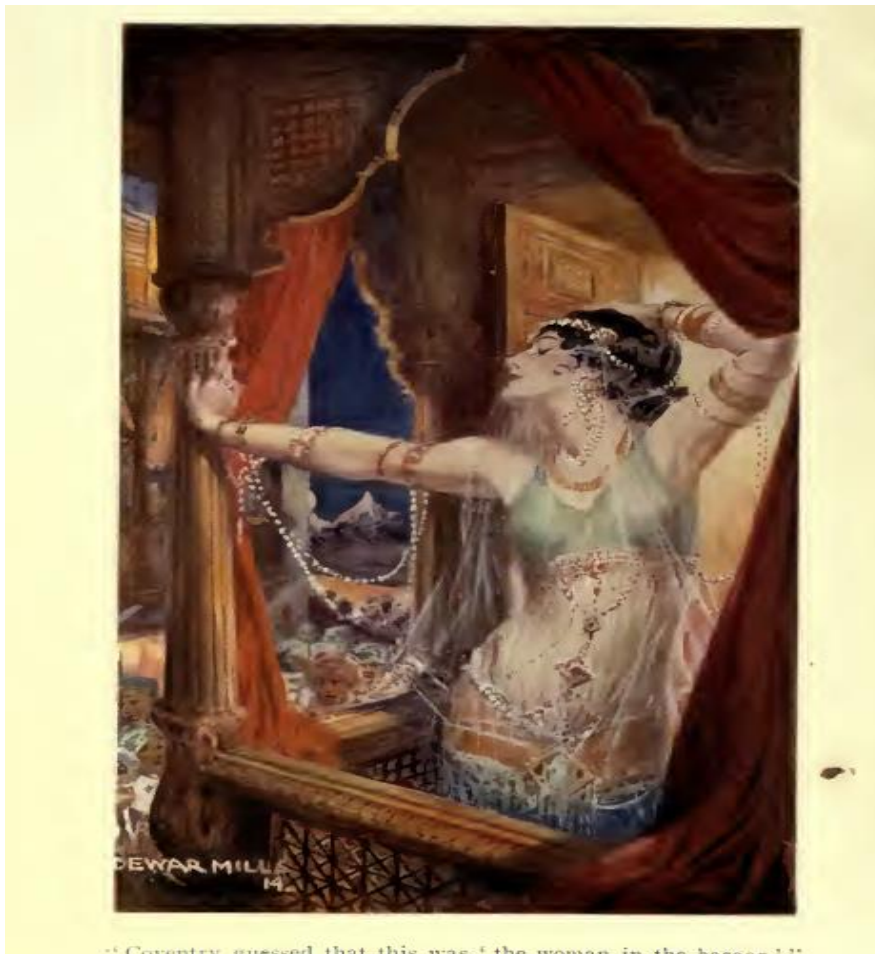
The Romance of a Nautch Girl gives a penetrating insight into the rituals and lives of the “native” Devadasis through Penny’s critical reflection. It is a rare novel that provides insight into the life of a native Devadasi through a British woman author. The novel has its shades of exoticism and Oriental hyperbole that was the feature of the narratives written during the era of Victorian narratives. However, it also has a documentary kind of approach towards writing fiction that may record native Indian traditions and cultures.

In the next section of this paper, the focus is on rumour and loneliness surrounding British wives of colonial offices, the extremes of which that might have forced them into prostitution in India during the colonial regime.

Rumour and Loneliness in *The Woman in the Bazaar*

Alice Perrin’s novel *The Woman in the Bazaar* (1914) challenges the stereotypes of women’s racial purity portrayed in the Victorian narratives.⁷ In the novel, Perrin presents a rare probability of European women pushed into “prostitution” while negotiating through the extremes of both domesticity, climate of the tropical landscapes like India, and the overarching anticipations of preserving imperial dignity as the soft-ambassadors of the British empire in India.⁸ *The Woman in the Bazaar* is perhaps the only Eurasian novel that acknowledges the presence of European “white” women courtesans who served native Indian subjects during the nineteenth century and earlier. Indrani Sen in her book entitled *Gendered Transactions: The White Woman in Colonial India, c.1820-1930* (2017) discusses the silence of economic and sexual transactions in the gender spaces of the Raj and their impact on women’s psycho-social health in the colonial era. She has highlighted the role of subtle power in the imperial homes of the Raj. In her study on prostitution in India, Ashwini Tambe reflects on the importation of European white prostitutes to India and the presence of European prostitutes in the major shipping ports of India like Bombay (Tambe, “The Elusive Ingénue” 160–179). Anjali Arondekar specifically mentions this unique novel of Perrin in her analysis of Anglo-Indian literature, “English female prostitute in India, a white woman openly servicing the native babus and soldiers” (Arondekar, “Too Fatally Present”152). The novel presents several aspects in the lives of European women courtesans in India in the late nineteenth century.

In *The Woman in the Bazaar* Perrin advances the idea that there might have been some European officers' wives who could have taken to prostitution in India in the wake of a failed marriage and extreme financial needs. The novel has a powerful plot and storyline and it stands out in the series of novels written by "New Woman" writers. The novel reveals the culmination of a fear of the corruption in Indian bazaar of the colonials (Johnson 172).



Coventry guessed that this was 'the woman in the bazaar.'

Illustration 2: The frontispiece from Alice Perrin's novel *The Woman in the Bazaar* by J.W. Mills. The illustration shows a European woman being subjected to the native man's gaze in the bazaar.

The Woman in the Bazaar narrates the story of Rafella Forte and Captain George Coventry. Rafella is a Vicar's daughter growing up in a countryside village, Cotswold at Under-edge in England. Captain Coventry, a British officer in India marries Rafella during his short vacation trip to England. For Coventry, the ideal of "womanhood" had to be well within the

limitations of social structures that focused on the heteronormative standards of an ‘obedient’ wife, a ‘good’ daughter, or mother of “genteel” upbringing; “His ideal of womanhood was modelled on the type represented by his mother and his aunts and his spinster sister, ladies whose sole charm lay in their personal virtue...” (6). Rafella was the free-spirited dreamer who had grown up taking care of her father in isolation of the vicarage. Marrying Coventry and moving to India from England marked the turning point in Rafella’s life. The story moves through the winding lanes of domestic spaces of British officers in India and articulates the story of the intricacies of their lives in India; “Domestic separation is only a part of the price that is paid for service in the country, but it is a part that is by no means easy to bear” (38). Rafella’s lack of adjustment to the new life in India and Coventry’s extreme strictness and beliefs on an “ideal womanhood”, leads to the moral crisis of the novel. The young couple are forced to ‘act’ under the demands of social norms of British cantonment spaces in India that focused on “social intermingling” in the clubs and gymkhana circles only. They are forced to perform as per the gossip circles of the club verandas and as per the demands of stern wives of senior officers. Rafella constantly gets torn between the need to be a “perfect” wife, an appropriately mannered *Memsahib*, and a free-spirited country girl who had married Coventry for love.

The story presents the paradigmatic cultural shift for several European women who lived in the colonies. While many *Memsahibs* were unaccustomed to the tropical weather of India or to the luxury of having many attendants in their own country, they were suddenly expected to “manage” and control entire households full of native attendants in India. The narrative presents a layered picture of the European household in India:

"But you must remember," admonished Mrs. Greaves, "that we are living under totally different conditions out here. The servants won't do each other's work, on account of their caste. We have to keep such a lot, not for our own convenience but for theirs. And you must have an ayah, unless you don't mind the menservants attending to your bedroom." (42-43)

Rafella thus faces the dilemma of being a “good” wife and a *Memsahib*, until she is able to take it no longer and vanishes from the cantonment. She talks to other British officers like Mr. Kennard, and her friendships are not taken kindly by ladies like Mrs. Greaves (a senior British lady in Rafella’s social sphere who guides and trains the new European wives that

arrive in the town) and later by Coventry. Rafella becomes the subject of rumour-mills and gossip circles for her constant free-spiritedness and her refusal to adhere to the norms set by the civilized society of the cantonment areas.

The bungalow and the ball room are spaces that open the private world of Coventry and Rafella's life for public scrutiny of other officers' wives and push Rafella into the epicentre of moral discussions (83-86). She constantly gets isolated and pushed into extremes of performance of being an "upright" British wife. She becomes a loner in the cantonment spaces. Coventry keeps adding to her insecurities with his constant expectation from her to behave according to the Victorian moral high-grounds. Coventry's suspicion of her friendship with Kennard, and his expectations from Rafella, intensifies her insecurities. The kindness that she expected from Coventry is not reciprocated. She finds Coventry as a stern officer who is there to "tame" his wife. The woman's body and her soul is expected to be colonized by only one master, just as the colonial land is expected to be under the subjugation of one master. The narration moves through various stages of intrigues in Rafella and Coventry's marital relationship until she elopes from Coventry's house and seeks refuge in the bazaar among natives. For several years, she remains a missing name, and transforms into a chimeric mention in the gossip circles of British clubs.

Coventry gets married a second time to a young (much younger in age) British girl, Trixie (the daughter of Mrs. Ellen Munro) after sixteen years of his divorce with Rafella. It was evident that even the name of Rafella was wiped out from the slate of his memory and from public memory. Trixie goes through a similar fate as Rafella, when Coventry becomes suspicious of her friendship with other officers (especially the young nephew of Mrs. Greaves, Captain Guy Greaves) in India and behaves sternly with her. It appears as if the fear, apprehension and yet the charms of an "alien" land where the British wives had the compulsion to socialize within their community, is the harbinger of a set of complexities:

"India rather frightens me," said Trixie, "and yet I get fits of fascination that make me feel as if the country had bewitched me. It all seems so old and so cruel, and yet so alluring. I felt the spell of it this evening on the river, and still more strongly when we were waiting in the bazaar for the procession to pass.
(125)

After several years Rafella reappears in front of Coventry in an unprecedented form of a courtesan in the *bazaar*. Colonel Coventry observes that Rafella is serving native *Rajahs and Babus* in her profession as a courtesan in the Indian bazaars. After leaving Coventry's home, she had found shelter with the courtesans in the bazaar and has become a part of their lives. He is transfixed by the sight of his former wife as the "woman in the bazaar". There is a sudden change in Coventry's personality after that episode of witnessing Rafella riding away with a native in the bazaar. There is a transformation in Coventry's personality. He becomes more perceptive to the anxiety and loneliness that Trixie might be through in India after he finds Rafella in this unthinkable state. The appearance of the woman in the *bazaar* after (shown in illustration 2) sixteen years, in "native dress and tinselled veil" and with "thick paint" (194) on her eyes and cheeks, comes as a shocking discovery for Coventry. He realizes that she is indeed his first wife and gets a sudden realization of the loneliness and alienation that she must have encountered in her marriage with him and in her life in the bungalow. The lewd comments of the men on the streets for Rafella leave Coventry paralyzed with shock.

It was then that full recognition struck at George Coventry's heart like the stab of a knife. The woman in the bazaar, who lived in the street of the dancers and suchlike, who now drove away in the Rath of Babu Chandra Das, was Rafella, his wife of the years that were over and dead. (196)

Rafella's character also underscores the silence of historical discourses about the existence of the "White" woman courtesan in India. While the European government on the one hand encouraged "cantonment prostitution" for Indian girls, there is a complete denial and even silence regarding the condition of European courtesans. Perhaps, the British Raj went out of its way to prevent European women to serve native men, and may have even tried to prevent European prostitution on the grounds of upholding racial superiority and 'purity'. In the novel, Markham states that the government tried to help the "woman in the bazaar" and attempted to "interfere and pay her home, but didn't succeed" (176). These women characters exist as stories in the unverified account of popular narratives. In a study on the intimate connection of prostitution and politics titled "Venereal Disease: Prostitution and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India," Philippa Levine states that the connection between venereal diseases like syphilis, prostitution and politics have been ignored by historical studies for a long time (Levine 579). She argues about the coerciveness that the colonial

practices unleashed through the passing of the venereal diseases acts in India (Levine 580). In another remarkable study, *Out of Bounds: Anglo-Indian Literature and the Geography of Displacement* (2011), Alan Johnson offers a reading of the intersection of spatiality and identity in the context of Anglo-Indian writers. The Indian bazaar, he argues, serves as a nefarious site of insurrection in Mutiny literature, a space for illicit behaviour and for physical and psychological “pollution”. The bazaar is a free-carnavalesque space that allows the existence of the Indian as well as the European courtesan. It permits nefariousness and breaks the tyranny of “official” expectations of behaviour of the Raj. The European courtesans were considered as sullyng agents of European respectability because of their contaminated interactions with the “native”.

It appears as if the memory of these women has been wiped out from the historical landscape of the Raj; “as if these women are physically erased from the landscape, appearing only on rare occasions, in the guise of figures such as Rafella, acting primarily as cautionary textualized reminders of the horrors of such a possibility” (Arondekar 154).⁹ The figures of European women courtesans in India pose more questions and bring out awkward silences in colonial histories. It must be also noted that Rafella serves native clients like Babu Chandra Das, thus opening a completely distinct chapter of “white degeneration”.

Markham also mentions another British woman, a “mentally” challenged British lady by the name of ‘Miss Grey’ who frequents the bazaar and is sometimes discussed in the gossip circles of the cantonment. Miss Grey’s family is said to have been destroyed in the Indian mutiny and the trauma of their death affects her sanity through her life:

Nobody knew who she was, and the poor thing couldn't tell them because she was out of her mind, and she had never recovered her reason. She had been handed on to these people by the missionaries they succeeded, and by others before them and there she had been living for over fifty years, perfectly harmless, costing very little, and only insisting on being dressed in grey and in the fashion of the Mutiny time. (174)

Rafella struggles with the moral rigidity of Coventry and tries to find her identity in the spatial gaps between the empire and the home. Miss Grey on the other hand is torn between histories and memories, trying to find her place in the memory of a mutiny that her family succumbed to in 1857. Women across the two races suffered the scars of political and

imperial aggression. In his analysis of Perrin's fiction, reflecting on Rafella's moral transgression and ethical break in *The Woman in the Bazaar*, Pramod K. Nayar argues about the ulterior imperialistic motifs in Perrin's thoughts:

Perrin seems to suggest that only those Englishwomen who fit perfectly into the norms of the English social sphere have successful domestic spheres and any disruption in either of these spheres has severe, and tragic, repercussions in the other as well. (Nayar 136)

Further, it may be noted that Rafella or Trixie do not submit to the Victorian morals of Coventry. Their presence is driven by their individualism and their extreme internal dilemma to break the limitations set by socio-cultural norms of European and Victorian ideals. Rafella is an equal victim of a destiny that she had hardly foreseen for herself. She has succumbed to the politics of domesticity, and to the fault-lines of rumour-mills that usually envelop a new face in the seclusion and severity of cantonments. Perrin's only attempt at providing a moral commentary is through the characters of Mrs. Greaves. She does talk about what is "required" to be a "proper" *Memsahib* in the colonial setup. For Mrs. Greaves, the "modern girl seemed to be a problem" (99). Perrin is quick to point out that Mrs. Greaves' life is comfortable yet "dull" (95). In spite of the moral advices of Mrs. Greaves, Coventry finally mends his ways to make himself more accommodating for Trixie -- "his conscience cried the bitter truth that always must he owe the saving of her love, and of her trust, to the woman in the bazaar" (214). Coventry does not forget that Trixie wins his love because of Rafella.

Perrin's novel maybe read as an extraordinary quasi-historical document that presents the "woman in the bazaar" as a unique identity reflecting the domestic and political conflicts within the colonial landscape.

Counter-reading of the Grand Narratives

To conclude, a text-intensive analysis of these fictional writings of late nineteenth and early twentieth century highlight the complexities in the lives of women both in the empire and in their colonies. The excess of rumour, gossip, and a certain mystery that shrouded these women characters like Minachee, Deva, and Rafella, lead to their ultimate fall. The "exoticization" of a woman can be mentally and emotionally debilitating as is established with a reading of the characters of these novels. They are pushed into loneliness, isolation,

and maybe into extreme steps of prostitution. These characters reveal the interconnectedness of historical processes and the causal relationship between the colonial times and postcolonial perspectives. Novels such as *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* and *The Woman in the Bazaar* are steeped in the language of Oriental exoticism. On the one hand, *The Romance of a Nautch Girl* focuses on the consequences of gossip and rumour leading to professional degeneration of Devadasis like Minachee and Deva, on the other hand, the story of *Woman in the Bazaar* focuses on the pain of a European wife Rafella who is forced into prostitution in a completely unknown world because of her domestic misfortune and her separation from her husband Coventry. In a certain sense, a parallel maybe drawn between the fate of the European woman and the Indian woman. The pain that they undergo because of casual rumour and gossip and the perception that is built around their lives, affect the course of their relationships and their identities in the novels. These novels hold the key to provide a counter-readings of grand narratives of colonial discourses in the light of the contemporary times. These novels may prove to be templates to learn about the emotive state of women beyond the colonizer/colonized, fiction/reality binaries. The genre of fiction opens these liminal spaces of complex domestic politics that are connected to greater domains of the politics of the Raj. The emotive terrains of women, their biological setup, and the demand for them to perform in certain ways in the socio-cultural systems of their own cultures, might be universal in its effect on their emotional well-being.

To conclude, literary history and criticism could treat these women authors of the Raj and the women protagonists from Indian subcontinent that feature as characters in their novels, with more compassion than the ways in which they were treated in the past century, now that memories of both colonial and the post-colonial times have settled in the fine pixels of the unconscious.

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comments on the paper. The constructive criticism of anonymous reviewers and readers of this study over the years have helped in enriching the arguments of this study.

Endnotes

¹ All the primary texts in this paper have been procured in soft format as archived and put for public consumption under Creative Commons licenses in Archive.org. This paper is a culmination of an elaborate study on the fictional writings by women authors from the British Raj in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, pursued as a research project at UNT Dallas, under the supervision of Professor Sura Rath in February to September 2014. Brief parts of this paper have been presented at the 69th Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Annual Convention (held in October 2015), and at the XVII International Theory Conference organized by the Centre for Contemporary Theory, Baroda in December 2014.

² For recent studies on the impact of women authors of the Raj and their layered role in the subversive politics of the colonial Raj, see Indrani Sen's dense feminist historiography of the complex layers of interactions between the European and Indian women of colonial India between 1820s and 1830s in her book *Gendered Transactions* (2017). Sen has presented a nuanced analysis of the transactions and complex experiences that European women and Indian women had during that era. She speaks of the "medical gaze" as a defining ground in this subversion of the colonial gender equations. Also, see Susmita Roye's edited volume entitled *Flora Annie Steel: A Critical Study of an Unconventional Memsahib* (2017) for a detailed study of Flora Annie Steel, known as the "female Kipling" for a detailed reading of a significant voice of women's writing from the corpus of Victorian women's writing of colonial India. Roye argues that the subject of gender and gender based performance are inextricably linked in the colonial writings of the women writers from the Raj, and particularly in Flora Annie Steel's writings (102).

³ See Barbara N. Ramusack & Antoinette Burton's review of literature on feminism and its relation to race and Empire building in "Feminism, imperialism and race: a dialogue between India and Britain".

⁴ All references in this paper to F. E. Penny. *Romance of the Nautch Girl*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd, 1898.

⁵ For an understanding on the historical and psycho-social evolution of "Gossip" and its appropriation in gender stereotypes see Patricia Meyer Spacks volume entitled *Gossip* [1985], and a counter discourse of gossip as a defense mechanism in Louise Collins paper on "Gossip: A Feminist Defense" in *Good Gossip*.

⁶ Bell describes Penny's place in the literary canon:

Penny had a passion for writing. In the course of her life, she wrote forty-six novels, most of them set in India. The last novel was published in the year she died—1939. Although the Victorian period was fecund with female novelists, Penny's novels were unusual in their curiosity and interest in the Indian people and things Indian. (Bell 30)

⁷ Alice Perrin was born in India in 1867. She was the daughter of Major General John Innes Robinson, of the Bengal Cavalry, and Bertha Beidermann Robinson. After her education in England, Perrin married Charles Perrin (d. 1931), an engineer in the India Public Works Department, in 1886. The couple lived in India for seventeen years. She published seventeen novels in her entire career and her short-story collections like *East of Suez* (1901) were very popular. See Melissa Makala's website dedicated to Alice Perrin, her biography and her works. Also, see Alice Perrin's biography at *Victorian Secrets.com*.

⁸ All references to Alice Perrin's *The Woman in the Bazaar*, London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1914.

⁹ From Ann Stoler, quoted in Anjali Arondekar, "'Too Fatally Present': The Crisis of Anglo-Indian Literature", p.154.

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Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the translation into French and English of the lexical culturemes in *Los cachorros* by Mario Vargas Llosa

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Abstract:

This work analyzes the English and French translation of the lexical culturemes in the urban novel *Los Cachorros* (*The Cubs*) by Mario Vargas Llosa in order to determine the domesticating or foreignizing tendencies in the two versions. This novel was selected due to the link between the alienation of the individual within a closed-off social status and the importance of the real space, the neighborhood of Miraflores in Lima, as the setting for the plot. To this end, Newmark's classification of cultural references is used to determine the nature of the original story's culture and Hervey and Higgins' techniques of cultural translation are applied to identify the predominant ones. This case study attempts to determine how the 1960s Latin American Boom in literature was translated into two major literary and canonizing powers of the time: the United States of the Cold War and the "World Republic of Letters" of Paris.

Keywords: Latin American Literary Boom, *Los cachorros*, intercultural translation, cultureme, translation of toponyms.

Introduction

Los cachorros is one of the short novels written by the famous Mario Vargas Llosa in the 1960s. It tells the story of Pichula Cuellar, a teenager emasculated by being bitten by a dog that belongs to Lima's middle class. In a few pages, the story presents the characteristics of the Peruvian author's masterpieces such as *La ciudad y los perros* (*The City and the Dogs*), *La casa verde* (*The Green House*) and *Conversación en la Catedral* (*Conversation in the Cathedral*).

From a technical point of view, this novel follows the trail of Vargas Llosa's experimentation, but it does not fit into the canon of magical realism, considered by critics to be a truly Hispanic American model. Rather, the writer settles into the totalizing vision of reality ("Prólogo" 42). To do so, he employs the "multidimensional" narrative, which consists of simultaneously expressing objective and subjective reality in the same sentence, by means of rhythmic combinations (Luchting 277). He achieves this effect by mixing places,

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actions, dialogues, thoughts, noises, fantasies, etc.: “he changes rhythm, suppresses verbs, twists the sense of the narrative discourse and confuses the people in the action” (“Prólogo” 36).

These characteristics pose serious translation challenges, added to the youthful jargon and Lima's colloquial language, conferring the anecdote with character, packing it with diminutives (very typical in Latin Spanish), highlighting the childishness to which the main character is condemned—and South America itself as a colonized territory, too.

From the thematic point of view, the writer deals with the oppression of the individual and the impossibility of escaping a cruel fate when the pre-established norms are not met. To do so, he interweaves three threads: male chauvinism, violence and social networking, which is not always enough to get ahead when one has a defect like the protagonist's. Such characteristics are reflections on the reality of Latin America, whose problems are revealed by the author in his essays (Omaña 141). The only difference between his journalistic writing and his literature is the way in which he criticizes, since “in novels he is always, so to speak, Aristotelian, insofar as he exhibits details and without the intermediation of images or symbols of evil or the evils that afflict society” (Esteban and Aparicio 18). Thus, the social indictment takes place in a specific space and, although its effluvium is universal, it is closely linked to Peru. The author himself confirms this:

[...] this idea was in my head ever since I read in a newspaper that a dog had emasculated a newborn baby in a small town in the Andes.¹ Since then, I dreamed of a story about this curious wound that, unlike the others, time would open rather than close. At the same time, I was thinking about a short novel about a “barrio”: its personality, its myths, its liturgy. When I decided to merge the two projects, the problems began. Who was going to tell the story of the mutilated boy? The “barrio”. (Vargas Llosa 9 qtd. in Esteban and Aparicio 22)

The “barrio” imposes barriers on the protagonist as a representative of the otherness in a suffocating microcosm: he begins his schooling late and has not belonged to the prestigious Miraflores neighborhood from the cradle. Although he exhibits his intellectual and sporting qualities in an attempt to compensate for his shortcomings resulting from the accident that

deprive him of his “manhood”, he will never manage to integrate in the structural matryoshka that cast him out of the school, of Miraflores, of Lima.

On the other hand, the importance of the inhabited space is reinforced by the fact that Vargas Llosa dedicates his work to Sebastián Salazar Bondy,² an intellectual and friend of the writer, and the author of *Lima, la horrible* (*Lima, the horrible*), a compilation of articles in which he criticized the Limeño character.

This thematic idiosyncrasy of the novel leads us to consider the cultural challenges in translating it into other languages and polysystems. Specifically, in this paper we explore how the English and French versions of the novel were undertaken, considering the cultural impact that U.S. policies in the war had on the translation of Latin American literature and the fact that the author was living in Paris at the time of writing the short story that is our object of study.

Aims and method

In view of Milton's work on the translation of *Los cachorros y otras historias*, our initial assumption is that the English version of this novel will be overly-domesticated compared to the French one. Milton extracts some examples of proper nouns, phraseology and cultural references from the English translation to justify the novel's North American feel. We are going to undertake a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the translation by Gregory Kolovakos and Ronald Christ of the lexical culturemes in *The Cubs* that had already been used in a previous work on the translation of *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (*Captain Pantoja and the Special Service*) to corroborate Milton's theory and compare the results with those obtained by using the same method in the study on Albert Bensoussan's French version. To this end, we will identify and classify the cultural vocabulary and translation techniques and assess the impact that the use of one procedure or another in context may have had on the English and French versions of the novel, as well as the domestic or foreign stance³ adopted by the translators as regards Peruvian culture.

In order to recognize the culturemes, we used the basis of the definition provided by Nord (*Translation as Purposeful Activity* 34) for these elements, taking up Vermeer's

nomenclature (1-10): “[the cultureme] is a social phenomenon from a culture X that is regarded as relevant by members of this culture and, when compared with a corresponding social phenomenon in a culture Y, is found to be specific to culture X”. Therefore, we will extract the terms that denote cultural aspects from the source text and order them according to Newmark's categories applied to “foreign cultural words”: “ecology”, “material culture”, “social culture”, “organisations, customs and ideas” and “gestures and habits”. We discard those that we call “covert culturemes” (borrowing House’s generic notion), understood to mean perfectly transferable signifiers whose concepts and connotations vary depending on the culture. Thus, we are left with those that form part of a culture’s idiosyncrasy as quintessential to it terminologically and conceptually speaking. This first task enables us to identify the nature of the culturemes in the source text.

Furthermore, by screening “patent culturemes” we can see a situation of empty target lexicon that, far from representing a dead end, has been widely studied by many translators: Vlokhov and Florin, Nida, Newmark, Hewson and Martin, Bödeker and Frese, Koller, Hervey and Higgins, and more (Hurtado Albir 612-613). In this paper, we will use the latter’s “cultural transposition” techniques to establish the levels of adaptation or exoticization of the elements analyzed. The horizontal categories will be intersected vertically by the factors that influence cultural transposition according to Newmark (145) and Nord's principle of double loyalty (*Text analysis in Translation* 34). The aim of this interweaving of quantitative and qualitative strands is to paint a realistic picture that will allow us to draw accurate conclusions about how the original culture is filtered in the translations tackled on either side of the Atlantic.

Production context: literary and translational canon of the 1960s boom

Los cachorros is part of the 60s' boom, a literary and editorial phenomenon in the second half of the 20th century that allowed a good many Latin American authors to gain recognition and spread beyond the borders of their countries to become bestsellers. The way to conceive the movement or to demonstrate its identifying signs can be found mainly in three theories (Larsen 68). The first one points to the aesthetic homogeneity and to the discovery of a distinctive language to describe the Latin American reality with authenticity. The second considers a literary trend to be a simple marketing product in a consumer society in which

being a writer became a successful profession and the number of readers increased thanks to the flourishing publishing market (Rama 173). In fact, translation allowed the “peripheral” Latin American system to appropriate a space that until then it had been forbidden to enter on the global scene (Ternicier 197).

The third theory is based on revolutionary historicism and the Cold War. The authors’ ideology, fluctuating between communist militancy and disenchantment after the Padilla case in 1971, with backing and investment from the United States in Latin American literature, led to the boom on the American continent. Undoubtedly, the U.S. institutional initiative to finance and promote closer cultural relations between the two Americas, including the translation of literary products from Latin American countries during the Cold War, had much to do with non-English language American works breaking into the market on the other side of the equator. In the case of France, the so-called “World Republic of Letters” by Pascale Casanova had already “discovered” Hispanic American literature before the boom (Steenmeijer 146). However, there was a quantitative growth in the number of translations via established publishing houses such as Gallimard (notably the collection *La Croix du Sud*, created by Roger Caillois in 1952 upon his return from Argentina) and the founding of a few independent and scattered publishing houses not based in Paris (Benmiloud 133). Other good indicators of Hispano-American literature’s growing popularity in France were awards such as the Best Foreign Book Award (granted to Vargas Llosa in 1980), the Medicis for the Best Foreign Book and the Roger Caillois (which the author won in 2002). Finally, institutional stakeholders of great prestige and influence also fostered the spread of Latin American literature in France: the Centre National des Lettres (CNL, 1993), the Maison de l’Amérique Latine (1946), the Maison de la Poésie (1983) and the Maison des Écrivains Étrangers et de Traducteurs (MEET, 1987).

According to Rama (162-163), aside from Latin American aesthetics the rise of translation came about due to the curiosity for the Cuban revolution that spread to such cultural heartlands as France, the United States, Italy and West Germany, with the resulting endorsement for the nationalism of a people disinherited since their decolonization.

However, from the translation point of view, not only is it relevant that authors like Vargas Llosa could be read in English or French as of the second half of the 20th century; it is also essential to consider how the boom was presented in the United States and France, that

is, in the words of the famous translator Suzanne J. Levine: “[...] readers also need to understand *how* Latin American writing is transmitted to them, and how differences and similarities between cultures and languages affect *what* is finally transmitted. Knowing the other and how we receive or hear the other is a fundamental step toward knowing ourselves” (14-15).

According to Krause (35-36), despite the rise of certain authors in this literary phenomenon, not all of them enjoyed the same recognition in all countries, especially in the neighbouring United States, which has little tradition of translation.⁴ In fact, Krause considers that although Vargas Llosa was one of the figureheads of the boom, he did not manage to enter the North American scene as quickly as other colleagues. Among the reasons he argues to explain this phenomenon is that the writer did not fit into the “canon” of the northern country's bestsellers, since most of the Latin American literature translated into English and marketed in the United States was very stereotyped and based on the “imperative of magic realism”,⁵ the image of the “South” (Molloy 371) that the Americans fabricated from the works of García Márquez and Allende.⁶ On the other hand, the situation in France was and is quite different; in fact, Benmiloud (141) speaks of the canonized triad of Fuentes-Márquez-Vargas Llosa in the media and the publishing market, and especially of the Peruvian author after winning the 2010 Nobel Prize. His presence in France has been maintained thanks to his faithful and influential translator, Albert Bensoussan, the author's ability to intervene directly in the French language in gatherings and television and radio programmes, and the fact that he has an apartment in Paris “as Carlos Fuentes had one in London”.

On the other hand, we are also interested in the translation standards that prevailed in the two publishing markets for our subject under study, the United States and France. As regards the latter, Bensoussan (“Problemas recurrentes de la traducción literaria” 10-11) warns of the resistance that translators must put up against the pressure from reviewers and editors who seldom take the risk of swimming against the tide of normative language, preferring to impose the “correct and neat language that they want the French language to always be, sick of linguists and grammar writers, forgetful of the brilliant and inventive Rabelais, Diderot or Céline”. French translation echoes the words of Kundera (45), who denounces that grammatical correctness is an editorial imposition:

[...] most translators obey another authority: that of the common style of 'beautiful French' (from beautiful German, beautiful English, etc.) [...]. The translator is considered to be the ambassador of this authority to the foreign author. [...] Every author with some courage commits a transgression and it is this transgression that is the source of originality [...].

Beyond the norms or resistance to them, Bensoussan also theorizes about what it means for him to translate Vargas Llosa from a stance that recalls Nord's bilateral loyalty:

According to my vision, translation must comply with two requirements: respect for the Other—the author, the foreign text—and respect for the reader—by clarifying the source text without excess; and it must be placed between two constraints: the necessary loyalty to the Spanish text and the essential compliance with the French language. That is why we will say [...] that translation is a compromise, an “entre-two”, a hybrid text that is halfway between the two languages. It is, in short, a compromise between two uncertainties.

In the Anglo-Saxon case, we know from Venuti (5) that “discursive transparency” will be required in the translation in order for it to be conceived as an original in the English context and thus hide the intervention of a third party. In this sense, Milton (457) points out that on many occasions at the time of publication of *The Cubs*, the US publishers ignored information about the translator in order to heighten this effect. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon critics applauded the simple, laconic style: “Let's take the example of fiction, the most translated genre in the world. Let's limit our selection to European and Latin American writers, the ones most translated into English [including Vargas Llosa]. In reviews they will be judged using the same criterion: fluency” (Venuti 2). Furthermore, Venuti considers that this yardstick for measuring the quality of a translation into English represents a transcultural impoverishment⁷ since priority will be given to that which:

[...] is written in English that is current (“modern”) instead of archaic, that is widely used instead of specialized (“jargonisation”), and that is standard instead of colloquial (“slangy”). Foreign words (“pidgin”) are avoided, as are Britishisms in American translations and Americanisms in British translations.

Fluency also depends on syntax that is not so “faithful” to the foreign text as to be “not quite idiomatic,” that unfolds continuously and easily (not “doughy”) to insure semantic “precision” with some rhythmic definition, a sense of closure (not a “dull thud”). A fluent translation is immediately recognizable and intelligible, “familiarised,” domesticated, not “disconcerting[ly]” foreign, capable of giving the reader unobstructed “access to great thoughts,” to what is “present in the original.” Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work “invisible,” producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems “natural,” i.e., not translated.

This commitment to “naturalness” imposed by the market relegates the translator to the servile level of invisibility and muzzles the exoticism of the original so as not to disturb the target readers with realities foreign to their habitus. These are, therefore, restrictions on literature, including translation, that the post-colonialists would take up again to denounce adaptation as a form of domination and manipulation of Third World texts in the Great Powers.⁸

Analysis

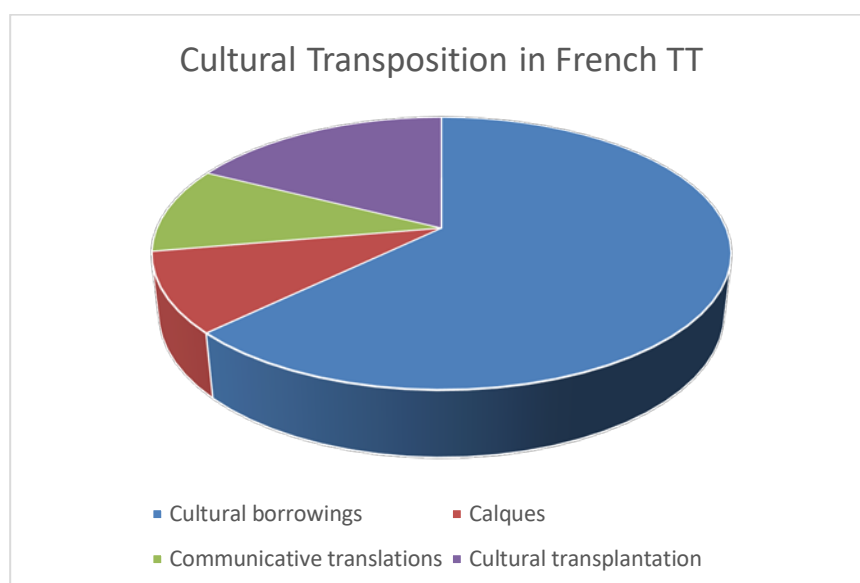
As we stated in the section “Aims and method”, we proceeded to extract the lexical cultuemes of the entire novel following Newmark's classification in order to determine the “cultural focus” of the starting text, that is, the semantic field from which most of the words belonging to the Limeño, Peruvian and Latin American community in which the story takes place emerge. The main difficulty we encountered in this phase of the study was on the one hand the need to separate the Peruvianisms alluding to unique cultural realities from those of the linguistic variety of Spanish, and on the other, the scarcity of documentary sources on localisms in the country. We worked mainly with *DiPerú. Diccionario de Peruanismos*, the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* and, in cases where entries were not recorded in either of these, with websites on Peruvian folklore and culture. In total, we identified 137 cultural references in which terms belonging to the material culture predominated:

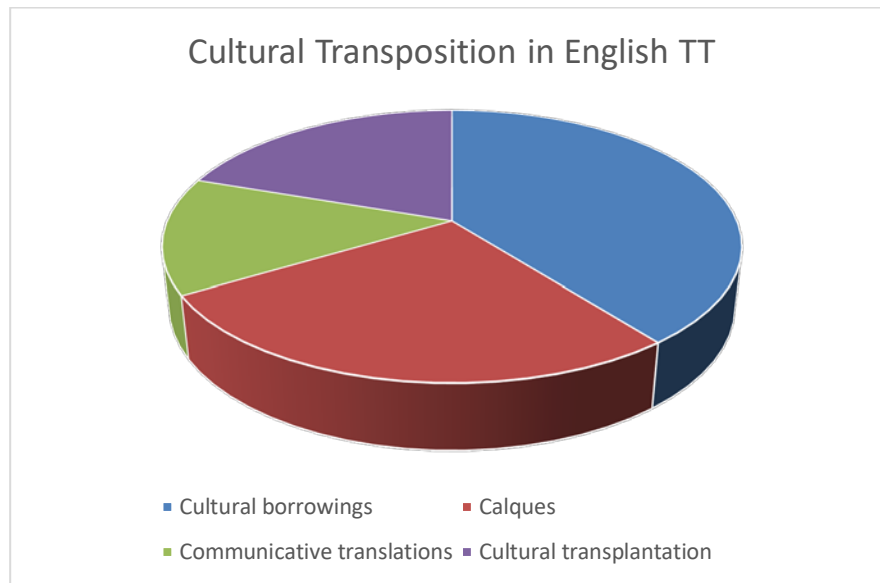


The category “material culture” includes subsets such as “toponyms”, which accounts for 83 terms out of the total number of items registered. This circumstance fits perfectly with the author's desire to outline the life of the “barrio”, whose pressure precipitates the tragic outcome of Cuellar in the city of Lima. It is demonstrated, moreover, that unlike novels like *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* (in which 59.46% of the culturemes belong to the category “ecology”, which has only one term in *The Cubs*) or *The Green House*, the Amazonian “habitat” is replaced by urban life. Along with the “material culture” and considerably far behind, 24 terms were collected pertaining to “social culture” (work and leisure) and 17 to “organizations, customs and concepts”. This shows that not only does space mark the life of the protagonist but also human intervention in it, specifically in the sectors in which adolescents participate. This is why all of the cultural references from social culture refer to leisure and not to work, and 10 of the 17 terms linked to social structures and concepts come from the Peruvian educational system.

However, following Newmark's postulates, from a pragmatic and holistic point of view it is not enough to count the culturemes but, in studying the cultural element, this translator includes contextual factors that condition the text, namely: 1. textual purpose; 2. readers’ motivation and cultural, technical and linguistic level; 3. importance of the cultural reference in the ST; 4. framework (is there a recognized translation?); 5. Newness of the term and 6. future of the reference. Considering these qualitative guidelines, we observe that in the original text the culturemes make up the setting of the novel, whose mission is to denounce social pressure and the absence of authenticity in certain areas of the city of Lima.

The Miraflores neighborhood is the ideal breeding ground to develop certain uses and customs, a place where the novelist's universal message makes sense without the need to create a literary world separate from reality. Indeed, the environment makes the message possible and characterizes the novel, since it describes what context a story as bizarre as Cuellar's can take place in. Therefore, from the point of view of Newmark's factors 1 and 3 (textual function and importance of the cultural reference) we can say that the culturemes identified are "familiar"⁹ to an original reader and that, although they may appear merely ornamental upon the first reading, the message conveyed would flounder as a realistic plot if the story of the anti-hero Cuellar did not take place in the "Guantanamo" of Lima's middle class. Therefore, we notice that the potent connotations that the alienating life of the Miraflores "cubs" has for the original audience should be maintained as much as possible in the US version, taking into account that, as we noted in the second section, US Americans are not used to reading translations, and even if readers are more accustomed to it as in France, they may be unaware of many aspects of the south of the continent. However, transferring the story to the United States or to a European country would not work either, precisely because this boom is synonymous with the search for Latin American identity (Bensa 87), with achieving stories that "do not lie" as Vargas Llosa himself indicated in his work *La verdad de las mentiras*, and with opening up to new places and concepts in collections such as *La Croix da sud*.





The intercultural techniques in the charts refer to the degree of incorporation of the original culture in the target text. Whereas borrowing implies the inclusion of a source term to fill a gap in the target lexicon, generating an exotic translation, cultural transplantation entails a total adaptation to the uses or customs of the target community. The two categories of cultural borrowing and transplantation appear to a different extent (86 to 24 cases in the French version and 54 to 27 in the Anglo-Saxon version respectively) and are complemented with intermediate procedures such as calques (translation of the content of the source text in a literal manner but in accordance with the grammatical rules of the target language) and communicative translation (search for identifiable communicative equivalents in the target language). The latter leans towards domestication but to a lesser degree than cultural transplantation, as can be seen in the following scheme by Hervey and Higgins (28).

Exoticism---cultural borrowing---calque---communicative translation---cultural transplantation

Therefore, communicative translation is connected to the canon of fluency and naturalness that uses neutralization or recognized translation to provide a lighter reading for the final Anglo-Saxon recipient. Therefore, it would fall within the transformative intervention that looks towards the acceptability of cultural translation, giving a total of 38 naturalizing situations in the French version and 46 in the American one.

Now let us focus on the interpretation of “calques”. Many of those noted in this study (36 out of 37 in the English translation and 10 out of 13 in the French one) are used to tackle the translation of culturally charged proper nouns (famous people and place names). In their

translation manual, Hervey and Higgins include a specific section to deal with onomastic translation and specifically the use of calques. They warn that its creative use in the absence of an equivalent to the proper noun in the target culture, as occurs in our translations under study, should be carried out carefully to avoid incongruities if the original place name is known by the target readers. This is a hybrid procedure in which “the structure of the TL name imitates that of the SL name, but grammatical slots in it are filled with TL units translating the individual meaningful units of the SL name” (Hervey and Higgins 21). The authors place the Solomonic technique at the centre of the cultural transposition line. We can compare their view with that of Franco Aixelá and Virgilio Moya, two Spanish translation theorists who have examined the cultural translation of proper names. The former classifies “linguistic translation” (calque) as a conservative technique that looks more towards the source as its guide (114) as long as the result is perceived as belonging to the culture or universe of the target text. According to Aixelá, this technique is usually used in transferring semantically imbued proper nouns or “expressive names”. For his part, Moya considers that in certain texts such as a tourist brochure or encyclopaedic dictionary, generic street names are translated (linguistically), which he calls “adaptation” (242).

Let us look at some examples of toponyms extracted from *Le chien* and *The cubs* to determine whether the source culture appears buried or emergent.

ST	FR TT	EN TT
Se tomarían la del estribo en <i>El Turbillón</i> , llegaremos justo al segundo show, Pichulita, que andara y que no llorara. Cuéllar se calmó por fin, partió y en la Avenida 28 de Julio ya estaba riéndose, (...)	Ils prendraient le coup de l'étrier au Turbillón , nous arriverons juste pour le second show, Petit-Zizi, qu'il démarre et ne pleure pas. Cuéllar se calma enfin, partit et avenue du 28-Juillet il riait déjà, (...)	They'd have the last round at the Tourbillon , we'll get there just in time for the second show, P.P., he should get going and quit crying. Cuellar finally did calm down, left and by Twenty-eighth of July Avenue he was already laughing.
(...) así se nos pasaban las tardes, correteando tras los ómnibus del Colegio La Reparación y, a veces, íbamos hasta la Avenida Arequipa	(...) et nous passions nos après-midi de la sorte, courant derrière les bus du collège de La Réparation et, parfois,	(...), and so we spent our afternoons, running after the buses of the Academy of the Indemnity and, sometimes, we

<p>a ver a las chicas</p> <p>de uniformes blancos del Villa María, ¿acababan de hacer la primera comunión? les gritábamos, e incluso tomaban el Expreso y nos bajábamos en San Isidro para espiar a las del Santa Úrsula y a las del Sagrado Corazón.</p>	<p>nous allions jusqu'à l'<u>avenue Arequipa</u> voir les filles en uniforme blanc du <u>Villa María</u>, est-ce qu'elles venaient de faire leur première communion? nous leur criions, et ils prenaient même le bus et on descendait à <u>San Isidro</u> pour guetter celles de Sainte-Ursule et celle du Sacré-Coeur.</p>	<p>went as far as <u>Arequipa Avenue</u> to watch the girls from Villa Maria in their white uniforms, just made your first communion? We'd shout at them, and we even took the express and got off at St. Isidor to take a look at the girls from St. Ursula and from Sacred Heart.</p>
<p>Recostado contra un poste, en plena Avenida Larco, frente a la Asistencia Pública, vomitó:</p>	<p>Appuyé contre un poteau, en pleine <u>avenue Larco</u>, en fase de l'Assistance publique, il vomit:</p>	<p>Leaning against a lamppost, right on <u>Larco Avenue</u>, in front of the public clinic, he vomited:</p>
<p>Bajaban por la Diagonal haciendo pases de basquet con los maletines, chápate ésta papacito, cruzábamos el Parque a la altura de <i>Las Delicias</i>, ¡la chapé! ¿viste, mamacita?, y en la bodeguita de la esquina de <i>D'Onofrio</i> comprábamos barquillos (...) Y después seguían bajando por la Diagonal, el <i>Violín Gitano</i>, sin hablar. La calle Porta, absortos en los helados, un semáforo, shhp chupando shhhp y saltando hasta el edificio San Nicolás y ahí Cuéllar se despedía, hombre, no te vayas todavía, vamos al <i>Terrazas</i> (...)</p>	<p>Ils descendaient par la Diagonale en faisant des passes avec les cartables, bloque ça pépère, nous traversions le Parc à hauteur de Las delicias, j'ai bloqué ! t'as vu, mémère ? et chez D'Onofrio à l'angle de la rue nous achetions des cornets (...) Et ils continuaient à descendre la Diagonale, le Violín Gitano, sans parler, <u>la rue Porta</u>, absorbé par leur glace, un feu rouge, flap suçant flap et débouchant sur l'immeuble de San Nicolás où Cuéllar les quittait, allons, ne pars pas tout de suite, viens au Terrazas (...).</p>	<p>They went down the crosstown shooting baskets with their book bags, get this one, baby, we crossed the park up near Delicacies, I got it, did ya see, babe, and in the D'Onofrio candy shop on the corner we bought ice cream cones (...) And then they continued along the crosstown avenue, the Gypsy's Guitar, not talking, <u>Porta Street</u>, absorbed in their ice cream, a traffic light, shhlp sucking and crossing over to the St. Nicholas Building and there Cuellar said good-bye, man, don't go yet, let's go to Terraces (...)</p>

In the table above, calques are shown in bold while the loans are underlined. We can see that the linguistic translation modifies the setting where the scenes take place in relation to the names of the streets and schools referred to, so the story tends towards the target culture, especially in the American version, since in French only “Avenue 28 de Juillet” is linguistically translated in the whole novel. In both languages, English and French, the transparent part of the proper nouns describing the type of place indicated by the toponym in question is translated and not transferred: *Calle* (rue/Street), *Avenida* (avenue/Avenue); *colegio* (collège/College), *Iglesia* (église/Church), etc. In English, moreover, the nature of the places is made explicit when this information is not shown in the original: *la Católica*> the Catholic U.; *a la cazuela del Excelsior, del Ricardo Palma o del Leuro*>to the balcony of the Excelsior or the Ricardo Palma or the Leuro cinema; *Javier Prado*>Javier Prado Street; *Dos de Mayo*>Second of May Street.

We also note that semantically charged place names such as “Diagonal” and “Asistencia Pública” are naturalized in both cases and even disappear as such in the English version when written in lower case. In the case of borrowed toponyms, we observe the preservation of the original French accent and the total naturalization in English. However, the calques of toponyms are more numerous in English, which reinforces the domestic feel via graphic naturalization. Thus, as Moya stated (238), we can conclude that the American English translation of toponyms means that the “very picturesque atmosphere” or “connotation of cultural diversity” (Bernárdez 21) is lost.

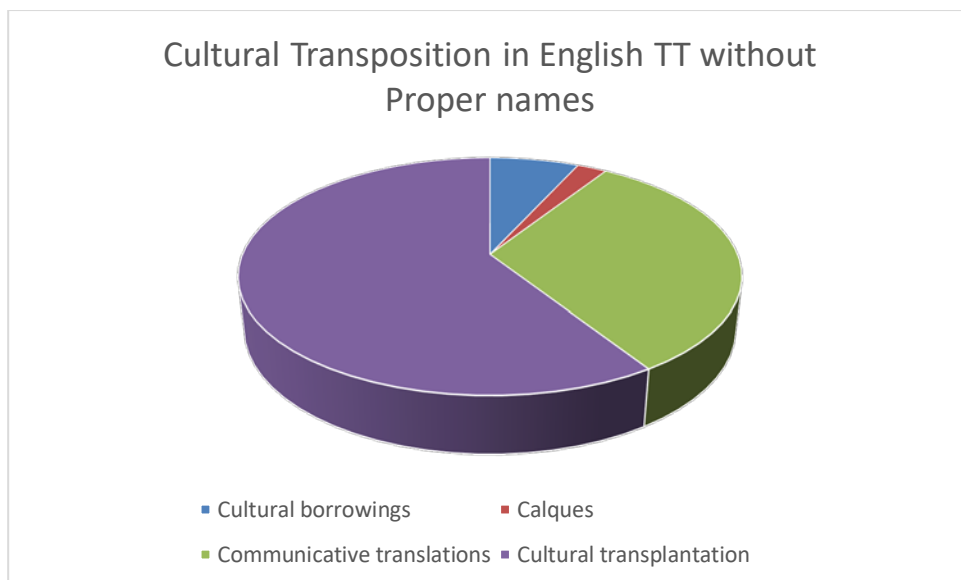
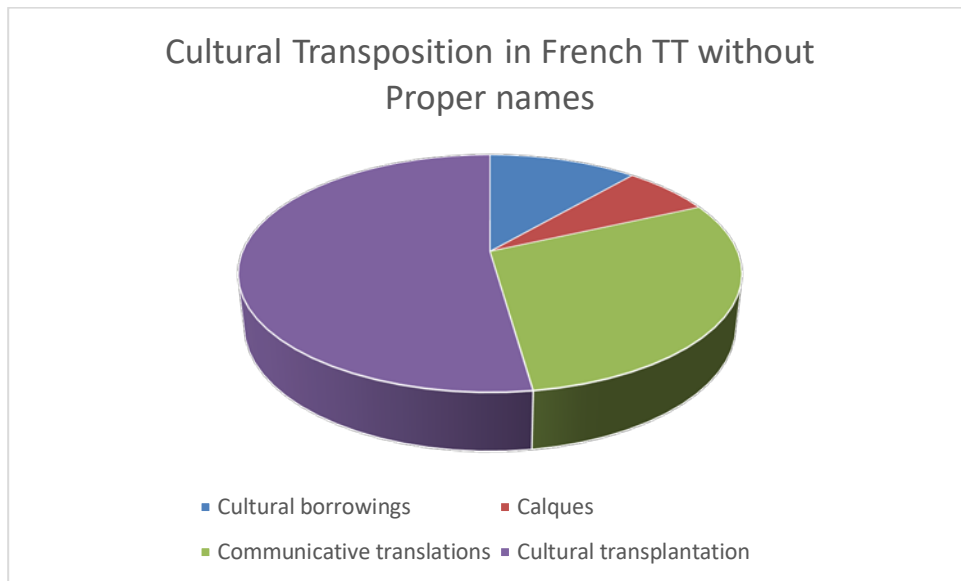
This inclination towards naturalisation is clearer and heavier in the area of “cultural transplantation” of place names, which in the US version leads the translators to incorporate “ocean's drive”, which seems to recall the famous street of Miami Beach, and “Chinatown” which replaces “Calle Capón”, thus losing not only the Hispanic allusion but also the pun on the literal sense of “capón”, which means ‘castrated’ (Fernández Ariza 111).

Considering all these elements, it is not surprising that Milton stated:

Proper nouns and personal names are often Anglicized. Equivalent American idioms are found. Cultural elements are Americanized. Where does the story take place? Those readers who don't know that Miraflores is a suburb of Lima, Peru, only see Lima mentioned on p.17, and Peru not at all. Indeed, we seem

to be in a mixed Hispanic-English setting, maybe a Chicano community in the United States? (456)

That said, what would happen if we ignored proper nouns (famous people and place names) in our analysis of culturemes and treated them as a separate challenge? In that case, we would obtain a very different result:



In these cases, we would be working with only 44 of the 137 culturemes, which would be a drain on the material culture in favour of social culture. It is clear, therefore, that the idiosyncrasy of Lima without the physical places is represented through interaction and intervention in space as we have mentioned above.

Looking at the charts above, the omission of culturally charged proper nouns inverts the degree of domestication or foreignization of the translation of culturemes in *Los cachorros*. In both English and French, the most profuse technique is cultural transplantation (23 in French, 26 in English), followed by communicative translation (with 13 and 14 respectively), cultural borrowing (5 and 3) and calques (3 and 1). The sum of the two most-used techniques shows that the balance of cultural translation tips clearly towards domestication, accounting for 81.8% of the results in French and 90.9% in English. Specifically, there are four areas in which the novel is naturalized in both target languages: gastronomy, games, the educational system and ethnonyms. Let us look at some examples:

ST	EN TT	FR TT
Fruna	Life Saber	Sucette
Melcocha	Gumdrop	Nougat
Irían al chifa	Go for Chinese food	Au reto chinetoc
Anticuchos	Shish-kebab	Brochettes
el sillau y el ají	Spicy food	Le soja et les piments
Piscos	Couple of bucks	Verres
simulando que jugaban a la pega tú la llevas,	Pretending to play tag, you're it!	En faisant semblant de jouer à tu l'as,
la berlina adivina quién te dijo	Who's got the button	mère qu'as-tu dit
o matagente ¡te toqué!	or ring-a-lievo, caught you!	ou à chat perché je t'ai touché!
<i>Huachafitas/huachafita</i>	Cheap girls/half-breed	Petites dévergondées/mignone pimbêche
Cholo	Old boy/	L'ami
En Cuarto de Media	During sophomore year	En première
En Quinto de Media	In senior year	En terminale

As we can see, in the cultural transplantation of non-toponymic culturemes, generalization is used (6 times in English and 7 times in French) or adaptation (20 times in English as opposed to 16 times in French), in which the effect on the transmission of the cultural weight prevails. Thus, we find that “fruna” and “melcocha” become American and French candies, while the nature of “anticuchos” (beef heart skewers) and “chifa” (Peruvian and Chinese fusion food) are not appreciated in the translations. Neither do the characters drink the famous Peruvian grape liquor “pisco” or play the genuine “matagente” in the two target cultures we have analyzed. The “huachafitas” (showy women of bad taste) and the “cholos” (men of indigenous blood) acquire new meanings in the target versions.

In view of such information, we can conclude that it is the allusion to place names that mainly marks the exotic flavor of the story in both languages, with a much greater incidence in the case of French.

In addition to the Latin American and Peruvian cultures mentioned above, we have also identified some American ones, so we can speak of a C2 (in the English translation) or C3 (in the French translation). According to Antenor Orrego (149), after the 2nd World War the North American influence in Latin America grew and the privileged classes imitated “Yankee” elements. Hence, as we have noticed, there is no lack of club names: Country Club, La Herradura Jazz Club, Lawn Tennis, etc. “The dream of a young Limeño was to travel to New York or San Francisco, or to drive the new models of Ford and Chevrolet through the streets of Miraflores or the seaside resort of Ancon [...]” (Ubalde Enriquez 29-31) In fact, there are four models of American cars that are being driven in the pages of *Los cachorros* (Chevrolet, Nash, Pontiac, Volvo). We should add to these references belonging to the “material culture” with gastronomic ones (milkshakes, hotdogs and the naturalized *hamburguers*, *sandwichito*, and *salchiparties*) and consumer objects (Lucky, Viceroy, Parker pen, Omega watch, Jantsen), while also identifying famous characters (Superman, James Dean, Ava Gardner, Elvis Presley), which would all fit into the “social culture”.

Conclusions

After carrying out the study, we have drawn the following conclusions:

Firstly, we have identified a total of 137 culturemes, with a predominance of those referring to material culture (69%), followed by social culture (18%). Specifically, the former

category is fed by a huge number of toponyms. In view of the pragmatic and contextual factors that condition the text, we could say that the importance of toponymic culturemes is high because the different settings of Lima and especially Miraflores generate the breeding ground in which the protagonist, Cuellar, is suffocated. *Los cachorros* is a story rooted in a specific land and, as we have seen, the canonization of the Latin American Boom of the 1960s not only involves selecting authors who share some innovative narrative techniques but also the fact that they place their characters in a Hispanic American environment in search of the lost identity of the continent's southern half.

As for the cultural translation techniques used by translators, the number of cultural loans is almost double in the French version (63%) than in the American English one (39%), while the sum of communicative translations and cultural transplantations comes to 28% and 34% respectively. In the light of these data, it can be seen that Bensoussan's *Les Chiens* looks towards the culture of origin quite clearly while Christ and Kolovakos' *The Cubs* is balanced between the poles of domestication and foreignization. It only remains to count the “calques” at one end of the scale or the other. Hervey and Higgins place them in the centre of their chart of degree of intercultural translation, halfway between the source and target cultures. However, after examining the culturemes that are transported with this technique, we realize that an overwhelming majority are toponyms (specifically, 10 from French and 36 from English). Therefore, we decided to compare the source text and the two targets in context and observed the naturalizing effect produced by the linguistic modification of the generally “untouchable” proper nouns. Therefore, if we break down a subset of toponymic transfer within the calque category, we notice that the domesticating techniques exceed the exoticizing ones in English, since they occur in 60.28% of the cases studied, while in French the figures do not change too much, with the percentage of naturalizing techniques increasing less conspicuously to 35.29%. Therefore, we conclude that we would be talking about onomastic “adaptation” in the sense given by Moya. This deduction is reinforced through the orthotypographic differences and compensatory techniques that we observe in the treatment of place names in the two languages: while French highlights the names of Peruvian leisure establishments in italics, English naturalizes them to such an extent that even when it maintains them, it eliminates the accentuation of Spanish or complements them with explanations that indicate the nature of those place names that seem cryptic in the source

novel. It should also be noted that both the French and American translators calque the transparent part of place names (*avenida, calle, inmuelle, colegio*, etc.) so that, although the name itself is translated more often in English than in French, in French the designation “street” is “expelled” from the proper noun and becomes common by being written in lower case. This inclusion allows the target reader to better assimilate the story while the maintenance of unadulterated nomenclatures preserves its exoticism.

With regard to the cultural transplantation of place names, in the case of the United States a step is taken beyond the loss of the picturesque feel by incorporating recognizable elements with clear connotations for American readers such as “ocean's drive” and “Chinatown”.

If we were to treat proper nouns as translation challenges differentiated from culturemes, the number of culturemes would be reduced to 44, many of which would belong to interaction and intervention in space (dances, songs, sports, children's games, festivities, entertainment). Likewise, the entire weight of exoticization would fall on communicative translation and transplantation techniques, which would represent 81.8% and 90.9% in English and French respectively, and which entail cultural losses in favour of communicative fluency. Therefore, as indicated in the previous section, we conclude that the allusion to place names is what mainly marks the exotic feel of the story in both languages, with a much greater incidence in the French case. The attitude of resistance from the French translator, Bensoussan, against the maxim of indiscriminate adaptation is evident here: “I opted for a literalism that did not mean slavish ease on the part of the translator, but rather was the result of reflection and a decision”, he told us about his way of translating Vargas Llosa in his 1996 article (40). However, the fact that communicative translations and transplantation take precedence if we obviate the transfer of place names also refers to a balanced attitude, in harmony with Nord's two-way loyalty: “good practice of the target language should lead to the search for the perfect equivalent, albeit introducing the necessary element of strangeness that will indicate to the French reader that the text he or she is reading was written in Spanish.” (“Mario Vargas Llosa visto por su traductor” 40).

In the case of English, even in the translation of some of the culturemes domestic translation coincides with Venuti's vision of the trend towards naturalization due to several factors: the scarce incidence of translation in the American publishing market and the

limitation of the translation canon of the target culture, more partial to applaud styles that “flow” and to the invisibility of other cultures, which indicates a clear asymmetry of power. However, not everything can be reduced to this Manichean interpretation. Inspired by Pym (132), Milton (460) considers that “foreignization” is more a philosophical construct than a way to solve the practical problems of the actual exercise of translation, and it prevents translators from dealing with deeper ethical issues such as how translation should generate a dialogue between cultures.

In fact, in our analysis we have gathered the incorporation of culturemes coming from the US American culture in the source text itself, which shows the great influence that culture and consumer goods had on the higher classes of Peru on the other side of equator. In these cases, cultural borrowings were used in the two translations analyzed. This fact, added to Vargas Llosa's collaboration in the English translation and the stylistic influence that he himself admits from American writers such as Faulkner or Hemingway, makes Milton think: “The original stories themselves dialogue with American English and North American values. Is it not therefore fitting and ‘faithful’ that the translation should attempt to reflect these factors?” (458).

Bearing in mind that our analysis is limited to lexical culturemes and that we have discovered that many of them are toponymic, we consider that apart from the translators’ work regarding the treatment of other textual units of the story such as phraseology, which are discarded in our study, onomastic exoticization would not hinder the flow of the story, so that fluency and spatial foreignization could coexist perfectly in the current format. The French version is a good example of this: it domesticates the translatable elements and keeps the cryptic part of many of the toponyms so that the action takes place in the Lima of the 1960s. In fact, the critical edition of the source novel that we have used for this work does nothing more than manifest intralinguistic references for non-Peruvian readers or for Peruvians who wish to know certain diachronic aspects of their own culture. In a globalized world, with a significant second generation Hispanic population in the United States, a rewriting in two formats could be considered: a “thick translation” following the philological method for experts and a fluid version including a greater degree of preservation of the toponymic legacy, representing in fact a historical and spatial reconstruction of the Peru of the 1960s.



Endnotes

¹ A few years after the publication of the novel, Oviedo (“*Los Cachorros: Fragmento de una Exploración Total*” 345) wrote that it recreated an incident that had occurred somewhere in Peru that Vargas Llosa had heard about in the newspapers, whereas Ortega (544) was a little more specific, stating that it had happened in Lima, where a boy had suffered an emasculation a few years earlier.

² Salazar Bondy died a year before the publication of *Los cachorros*. Vargas Llosa connected the aspect of marginality applied to the destiny of the Latin American writer and intellectual of the 1960s with what happens to Cuellar after the accident, who distances himself from his family and social environment as he grows up, until he becomes a true outcast (Luchting 54).

³ This terminology comes from Venuti. Toury (54-57) speaks of “acceptability” and “adequacy”, and Holmes (147-48) of “naturalization” and “exoticism”.

⁴ “The figures from *Literature Across Frontiers* reinforce the statistic that 3% of books published per year in the US and UK are translations while in France and Germany this percentage came to 14% and 8% respectively. Recently these numbers have increased even more.” (Delgado Darnalt)

⁵ The “eccentricity” and “difference” was linked to a “noncosmopolitan aesthetic” characteristic for the use of narrative resources “that fed the mythology of the Latin American region as a producer of exotic fictions.” (Bencomo 35)

⁶ If we look at *The New York Times*' bestseller lists in the United States in August 2013, only the Colombian Juan Gabriel Vásquez with his work *The Sound of Things Falling* managed to get in as a representative of Hispanic American literature. The translator of this novel pointed out: “The Anglo-Saxon readers’ impressions of Colombia are halfway between the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez and the dirty and tragic realism of the journalistic reports on drug trafficking, kidnappings, guerrillas and paramilitaries” (Delgado Darnalt). As for the 100 titles in Oprah's Book Club 2010, there were two novels by García Márquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, which made its way into the selection precisely the same year that the English-language film based on the novel was released) and another by Allende (*Daughter of Fortune*) identified. We observe that all the titles fall in the context of the wave of “magical realism”. The “Oprah” phenomenon is considered essential in promoting reading among women in the US and includes a commitment to African-American writers, among others. It is characteristic for taking the reader out of their “comfort zone” where they would remain stuck if they followed their habitual choices (Tyler 137-139).

⁷ Milton (455) considers that the Anglo-Saxon community has lost contact with the other and that translations following the premise of naturalization and fluency only serve to ostracize culture by preventing new poetics, lexicons and concepts from penetrating the Anglo-American border.

⁸ Authors like Asad were convinced that texts from poor countries are those that adapt and transform to the needs of the West: “The translation is addressed to a very specific audience, which is expecting to read *about* another way of life and to manipulate the text according to the established rules, not to learn to *live* a new way of life.” (Asad 159).

⁹ The publishing house Verbum's Madrid version has annotations everywhere so that a Spanish-speaking reader who is not familiar with Lima's history can understand the connotations of place names. Some are repeated in other novels by the writer such as *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (*Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*), so the way in which they are rewritten in other languages has intertextual implications.

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The Semiosphere of Arthur Avalon's *Mahanirvana Tantra*: the First English Translation of a *Tantric* Text

Ariktam Chatterjee¹

Abstract:

Arthur Avalon's English translation of *Mahanirvana Tantra* in 1913 was the first *tantric* text to be translated into a European language. This article traces the cultural dynamics which made this text a representative of the late colonial *zeitgeist* necessitating its translation. *Tantra* moved from being an object of derision in the early nineteenth century to the centre of the cultural semiosphere in the second half of the century reaching its height in the post Partition of Bengal period due to its close association with militant nationalism. This shift was congruent with a concerted project to present *tantra* on a monistic line commensurate with Vedantic thinking, and not a champion of sectarian belief and elaborates rites. The article studies these shifts to finally revisit the curious *innenwelt* of *Mahanirvana Tantra* and its unique position within the *tantric* corpus, placing the entire study within a semiotic grid proposed by Juri Lotman.

Keywords: *Mahanirvana Tantra*, Arthur Avalon, Semiosphere, Translation of *Tantra*

Such art (of cultural translation) does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.
(Bhabha 7)

That which is known by intuition may also be known from external signs; For them who know Him from these external signs, for them *sadhana* is enjoined.

(*Mahanirvana Tantra* 3:10)

In *Universe of the Mind*, Tartu semiotician Yuri Lotman develops Vladimir Vernadsky's idea of the biosphere to formulate his delineation the human cultural space in terms of a

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‘semiosphere’, a prerequisite aggregate of cultural signs that is necessary for any semiotic function. He states:

The semiosphere is the result and the condition for the development of culture; we justify our term by analogy, with the biosphere, as Vernadsky defined it, namely the totality and the organic whole of living matter and also the condition for the continuation of life. (Lotman 125)

Thus, the semiotic moment is both performed within a semiosphere while simultaneously contributing to its formation. The smallest functioning mechanism within a semiosphere is not a single sign (or as a sign text), but the whole semiotic space whose internal organization is created and sustained by the multiple sign processes occurring at the different levels of multi-faceted and multileveled system of communication.

Speaking about the internal organization of the semiosphere, Lotman clarifies that ‘the set of languages in an active cultural field is constantly changing, and the axiological value and hierarchical position of the elements in it are subject to even greater changes’. (Lotman 124) This ensures the semiosphere to function as a highly dynamic spatial metaphor, which is defined both by a flux that operates within its boundary. Noth explains how Lotman conceives of the spatial metaphor of the semiosphere as a necessarily self-reflexive system. (Noth 249) Lotman states, ‘the extension of the metastructural self-description from the centre of the culture over all its semiotic space, makes it possible for an historian to look at an entire synchronic section of the semiosphere as something unified, though in fact it only gives an illusion of unification’. (Lotman 131) The illusion is best challenged when the space is confronted through a set of historical conditions by the ‘beyond’. The boundary, both in Lotman and Bhabha becomes the richest performative space, as that which defines a particular semosphere by jeopardizing the stasis of its organization by bringing in the semiosphere that resides outside itself.

Thus, the individual sign within the semiosphere always has a possibility of movement. And this movement, if not observed or observable within the centre is often validated by its connection with the semiosphere which lies beyond its own boundary. This spatial communication is necessarily carried out semiotically. According to Kalevi Kull, one

of the foremost commentators on the works of Juri Lotman, the communication between the semiosphere and the sign is carried out through two, not disparate but hierarchically structured, channels – translation and dialogism. Lotman himself thinks that the dialogic situation creates the common language that underlies the translation of messages.

The most volatile and busy section of the semiosphere, which has been noted for its significant deployment of the spatial metaphor, is the boundary. The boundary creates binaries, notably an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’. These two spaces are mutually untranslatable unless semiotically. The semiosphere is thus a close and bounded system, and it is at the boundary of two or more such systems that translated operates. However, although the necessity of the boundary is brought in a theoretical necessity, it is better understood not a bound system but a space of overlap. Its dynamicity attests the constantly shifting positions of signs within the semiosphere. It is perhaps clear at this point that the boundary itself is not impervious to this movement. The flux negotiates the boundary as well. Moreover, since Lotman is emphatic in his claim that the boundary of the semiosphere is the most vital part of it, and translation is the ur-text of that boundary, so it is clearly understood that negotiation of the inner semiospheric movement and the resultant repositioning of the boundary affects the communication between the ‘outside’ semiosphere as well. This is, with all its complexity, still only the first level of modeling.

A second level overrides it, for this recourse to the biosemiotic model of Marko von Uexkull is necessary. The relationship between the Tartu school of semiotics and the biosemiotic model of Uexkull and Seebok has only begun to be explored by thinkers like Kalevi Kull and Peter Torrop. Although this is not the space for a comparative analysis of the two model, I would use it to methodically justify my approach is interpreting and understanding literary translation. Largely, the approach I would take is to consider the text as an organism, a sign-text within a semiosphere analogous to the way a biotext operates within a biosphere. Aligned to that is the *innenwelt* of the text, which typologically reflects the *umwelt* of its existence. which reflects the *umwelt* of its existence. The role of translation in this relationship, I may stress, has been explored. Thus, the rich semiotic network that we get operate on three levels of semiosis –

- i. Between two semiospheres which are bound, closed and untranslatable unless semiotically carried out.
- ii. Between the centre and the periphery of a single semiosphere
- iii. The *innenwelt* of the text, which semiotically reflects the *umwelt* of its production.

All translated text follows exists in the above *bauplan*, but for the present the particular text I choose to show how this *bauplan* functions by putting the semiotic relationships at play is Arthur Avalon's translation of the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, which was published for the first time in 1913. One reason of choosing a *tantric* text is because *tantra* invests heavily in understanding the semiotic translation between an organism's *innenwelt* and the *umwelt* as its Universe as typologically reflecting each other; and like semiotics in Biology, has itself been on the boundary of the academic semiosphere.

The general structure that will be followed in this article can be simplified in the following schema:

1. The conversations between the European and Indian thinkers on matters religious and scriptural in the early 19th century, in which the Orientalists create the centre largely through ambitious translation projects, and *tantra* inhabits the edge
2. The movement of *tantra* from the periphery to the centre vis-à-vis socio-political as well as legal reforms, and its changing status in relation to the changing modality through which the nationalist movement unfolded towards the end of the 19th century; and thus initiating a new perception from the 'beyond' through translation.
3. The inner world of the *tantric* text itself, and its relationship with other *tantric* texts.

One of the interesting features that emerge from this schema is that while the first two have every appearance of being a diachronic analysis, they are mostly of a synchronic nature, while the last despite appearing diachronic operates within the synchronic world of *tantric* scriptural dissemination and practice. The categories are not mutually exclusive, and there are clear regions of overlap, but at the same time it is also worth

remembering that each of the levels are distinct semiospheres within which communication is being possible only because the semiotic moment of the translated text is making it possible.

On the margin of the Semiospheres

‘The bridge of thoughts and sighs that spans the whole history of the Aryan world, had its first arch in the Veda, its last in Kant’s Critique (Muller xxvii)

It is interesting how often the metaphor of the bridge recurs while describing the early cultural encounters between the Europeans and the Indians from the 18th century onwards. This bridge, like any bridge, allowed crossing over. Yet, the bridge also serves as a meeting point - a point which is sometimes inclined towards one bank and sometimes towards another, yet in a spatial metaphor of the cultural space, whose liminal locus is inevitable. Following Muller’s rhetoric above, it can be surmised that if the Vedas formed the arch, then translation was the bridge. The earliest religious conversations between the Indian and the Europeans in the colonial times revolved around the Vedas, which closely followed on the heels of the *Bhagwat Geeta*, the first translated Indian text in a European language. What Muller stated in the preface to his translation of Kant’s work was representative of the German zeitgeist, which among its enthusiasts counted Arthur Schopenhauer. At the root of this optimism were immense translation projects led by Orientalists like William Jones, Colebrook and Max Muller himself. Later on, the missionaries who arrived in India with the express purpose of translating and disseminating the Bible and developed the material bulwark necessary to carry out that work, also ended up translating scriptures, learning Sanskrit and Indian languages, and lending resources to facilitate translations of ancient Sanskrit texts. The names of Henry Martyn and William Carey can be remembered in this context. By the turn middle of the 19th century, the West was well familiar with the major texts, ideas, philosophical premises and literary content of the sacred books of the East.

Well, almost all. There was a significant omission – the *Tantric* texts. Tejaswani Niranjana would later identify as the inherently asymmetric nature of translation activity. (Niranjana 2) Texts were being selected and translated that would suit the Orientalists’

expectations and would not offend the Europeans' taste. While Vedanta and Vaishnava could be accommodated easily, *tantra* presented a problem. Most Christian observers in India in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whether scholars, missionaries, or European travelers, found the goddess worship they encountered off-putting. This was true whether they were commenting on idolatry, on the Kali of the famed temple in Calcutta, Kalighat, on blood sacrifices within temple precincts or on the supposedly licentious practices of goddess-worshipping *Tantric* votaries. (McDermott 50)

William Ward, who was generally tolerant of differences, was repulsed by the scenes in Kalighat. He writes in 1811:

The bleating of the animals, the number slain, and the ferocity of the people employed, actually made me unwell, and I returned about midnight filled with horror and indignation. (Ward 190)

One of the reasons of this absolute impossibility of communication was the lack of anything common that could be found in the Christian doctrine and the *tantric* doctrine. Vaisnava bhakti had lots in common with Christian faith. Vedanta and monism had clear parallels, as did the Trinity and Samkhya philosophy. But mother worship rites had little in common. No semiosis was possible amidst these spheres. Hans Kung said, the Sakta and the Tantrik systems were 'extraordinarily alien to Christians, more alien than anything we have met thus far in Buddhism and Hinduism'. (Kung 414)

Its position, even within Bengalis, was precarious through the early half of the nineteenth century. The Bengali converts and the reformers were clearly against *Tantra*. Krishna Mohan Banerjea and Lal Behari De, both early converts despised the Sakta tradition and the practice of *Tantra* in no uncertain terms. In *Hotum Pyachar Naksha* as well in Banerjea's maiden literary endeavor, the play *Persecuted*, the opposition of the young Bengalis to kali worship is clear and pitched. Saktism was singled out among the Hindu worship and belief system for criticism, and in Bengal that was closely related to veneration of Kali. Thus within the religious discursive field throughout the early half of the nineteenth century, *tantra* was marginalized and despised. There were two axes along which the

marginalization was perpetuated: the rise of the Brahmo Samaj and the spread of Western education which apparently based itself on Protestant principles of reason and utility.

Rammohun Roy's attitude to *tantra* was ambivalent. By and large, with the exception of the Mahanirvan *tantra* and *Kularnavatantra*, he despised it. This was largely because he despised idolatry and *tantra* is a very storehouse of it. This was integrally linked with the Christian missionary thought on one side, and the deep influence that his scholarship in the Semitic languages and Islamic education left in him. Both traditions were intolerant of idolatry. Thus, largely due to the attack of the missionaries on one hand, and reformed Hindus on the other, *tantra* from the beginning of the nineteenth century seem to be relegated to the discursive margin. It was deemed irrelevant at best and a repulsive later day corruption of the grand Vedic system at its worst. Most importantly, it was not in-keeping with the grand and noble 'Orient' that Europe was willing to accept India as. It was not a part of translation projects, of inter-religious discourse, or of religious practice of the urban dwelling. English educated reformed Hindus and Brahmos and the academic apathy towards it became pervasive and may even have become a lasting legacy.

Yet, the fact that it was present in the semiosphere of Bengali thought is clear if we move from the symbolic to the indexical sign within the semiosphere. There were a proliferation of kali temples that were being built around Bengal around this time. Although it lacked a voice, it did not lack a view. The temples contributed to a metaphor for all to recognize and yet none would speak about it. But what was marginalized in the semiosphere in the early half of the nineteenth century gradually made its way to the centre in the second half. The indexical would take a symbolic turn, the metaphor would change into a metonym. In a semiosphere, signs mean sign structure, and the discursive signs around religion were re-orienting the spatial *bauplan* with the growing political signs which were changing, with the trigger offered by the Revolt of 1857. From there to the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the Rowlatt Act of 1908 we witness a period of steady growth in nationalism that was antagonistic and unaccommodating. It was also the time that *tantra* made its way to the centre as an ideological tool deployed to give rise both to a more militant form of nationalism politically and a refashioned Orientalism culturally.

Tantra Old and New

Tantra means different things to different people. From the philosophic deliberations of the Kashmiri Shaiva *Tantra* to New Age sexual techniques, the very mention of *tantra* evokes varied reactions and associations. The *tantra* that we are going to deal with in this article is the corpus of texts and associated spiritual practice that prevailed in Bengal from at least the 6th century CE, more specifically the Shakta *Tantras*. Religious practice in Bengal was on *Tantric* lines from the very beginning. The earliest Bengali texts, the *Charyapadas*, are esoteric deliberations about the practices and philosophy of sahaajiya *tantric* Buddhists. *Tantra* is overwhelmingly present in Bengali's religious rites and practices, even if they go unrecognized at times. Methods as diverse as the Vaishnava and the Vedantic in Bengal have also been colored in *Tantric* hue, and Bengal's greatest festival, the Durga Puja, is essentially a shakta *tantric* rite.

In the early 19th century, although despised and unrecognized by the most recognizable section of Bengali intellectuals, *tantra* was building a bridge of a different kind through the theosophists. Madam Blavatsky's highly controversial book that began the movement was inspired by *tantra*. The way theosophists came to be associated with the Home Rule movement showed a sign that *tantra* could be maneuvered to serve a nationalist end. Julian Strube has investigated how much of the early collaborators to the Theosophists were Bengali intellectuals who started writing books on *tantra* from the 1850s. After the Revolt of 1857, the same thought process came to be detached from the Theosophists and directly applied within the nationalist discourse that was beginning in Bengal. Urban observes how 'throughout the late nineteenth century, *Tantra* was increasingly identified with the most dangerous subversive movements, such as the criminal Thuggee and political extremists of the nationalist movement'. (Urban 74) Tantrism acquired a new political dimension as British fears about civil unrest and mutiny were excited and linked to the supposed degeneracy of the natives. *Tantra*, as is clear, was developing as a dialectic category not unlike Fanon's development of categories leading to violence, where '*tantra*, (which) could be employed by colonial authors as proof of Indian backwardness, barbarism, and savagery, could also be turned around and redeployed as the symbol of India in violent revolt against her colonial masters'. (Urban 74) A metaphoric application was in *Tantra*'s

typology of secrecy. *Tantric* texts re-iterate often of its being a secret knowledge, a gnosis that is to be received and practiced in secrecy, often applauded as a virtue. This sign was metaphorically extended to validate the actions of the secret societies that developed across Bengal in the early part of the twentieth century. For Aurobindo Ghosh, who was at the helm of the *Anushilan Samity*, and whose brother Barindra was a *karta* or master of the more radical *yugantar* group associated with it, nationalist operation and religion could not be separated. He clearly stated:

Nationalism is not a mere political program; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God. Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live...If you are to be a Nationalist...you must do it in the religious spirit...It is not by any mere political programme...that this country can be saved...What is the one thing needful?...the idea that there is a Power at work to help India, that we are doing what God bids us. (Aurobindo 6)

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* turned into a metonymic cul-de-sac for nationalism and *tantra*, providing the movement with its most endearing set of signs. Kali, the deity of *tantra* was refashioned and allegorized as the 'Mother India', to whom the British were to be offered as sacrificial white goats. The rhetoric of sacrifice to the mother was paramount in their writings. What is the most interesting part of this movement is the way in which this movement of *tantra* from the margin to the centre of the semiosphere created a refashioning of *tantra* related books as well, which meant writings on *tantra* as well as actual *tantric* texts, with a reform observable in the closed *innenwelt* of *tantra* as well. The Bengali intellectual groups who opposed this were being decried as effeminate and misguided through 'Western' modes of knowledge and succumbing to accommodating themselves towards an Orientalist image of India and Indians, which was demeaning. The rhetoric of masculinity was at the centre of this refashioning, with its chief fetish in the feminization of the country as the hapless and hungry mother who is in need of protection and succor.

But this movement also came with a vigorous refashioning of its *innenwelt*, adapting its different parts in response to the changing semiotic ecology and influencing it in turn. *Tantra* includes two kinds of texts – the original *tantric* books and commentaries on them. Digests on *tantra* are as old as *tantric* books themselves. Within the *Sakta* tradition of *tantra* in Bengal, *Shaktananda Tarangini*, along with *Brihat tantra sara* are two such texts which

are not a single *tantra* but derive from a wide gamut to guide the seeker or the *sadhaka* through the *kaulatantric marga* of *sadhana*. Many books on *tantra* begin to appear from the later half of the eighteenth to the early part of the twentieth century, and we see that their ideological emphasis has decidedly shifted from the early *tantric* texts. We will look at two of them to understand this shift of emphasis. One is *Tantrik Guru* by Nigamananda Paramhansa which was published from Dhaka in 1911, and quickly ran into many editions. The second is an article called ‘Banglar *tantra*’ by Panchkari Bandyopadhyay published in 1906. These are only two of many such publications that started to make their way among Bengali readers.

The introduction of *Tantrik Guru* clearly lay down the premise for publication:

Tantra is a miraculous creation of the ancient Aryans. It is divided into two parts – the parts of *pravritti* and of *nivritti*. *Pravritti* includes remission of diseases, astrological interventions, hypnotism, magic and the six karmas (of *maran*, *stambhan*, *mohan*, *uchatan*, *bashikaran* and *akarshan*), as well as the communion with supernatural beings. It is not advisable to follow this *marga*; particularly modern people with their unrestrained minds must avoid it. My subject for this book is the *sadhana* of the *nivritti marga*, which the seeker can follow for self realization. (Nigamananda 6)

He goes on to explicate in the first chapter:

Tantra is not an exclusive *sastra*, it is a transformation of the Vedas, it contains in particular the essence of *Samkhya* philosophy and the *Upanisadas*. It reveals a convenient way towards liberation. (Nigamananda 7)

In this fascinating introduction, Nigamananda Paramhansa further explicates how there are ancient *tantras* as well as new *tantras*, and states that the new *tantras* have induced rites which are sure to appear repulsive to an educated mind and does not take one to the path of liberation - the ultimate goal of all *tantras*. Even in some of the old *tantras*, he states, there have been rites that even after being mediated through the holy mouths of Siva and Parvati, have failed to import any purity or sacredness. The indication is an acknowledgment of human agency in the composition of the *tantric* texts, and thus also of individual and temporal influences that may have colored it. This is a radical claim on the authority of scriptures, which draws much of its authority from testimony. He warns the reader to steer

clear of the practice of such rites. He states that where *tantra* goes against the karma kanda of the Vedas, it clearly states it as a warning sign to the sadhaka. A seeker must clearly discern the *sattvik* element of the *tantras* from the *tamasik* and *rajasik* elements that were interpolated at a later state. He rather pitches *tantra* right within the philosophical premise of Samkhya, and states that the numerous deities that are enumerated in *tantra* are symbolic representations of truth as revealed in Samkhya, including Kali. The authorities that he quotes for validity of the *tantras* range from the Vedas to the Bhagwat Geeta to Vedantic scholars like Shankaracharya – which are interestingly texts outside the kaula *tantric* tradition. Among the Puranas, he quotes the *Vayu puranas*, the *Brahmavaivartapurana*, but not *Kalika Purana* or *Devipurana*, which were traditionally associated with *sakta tantric* tradition. Among the *tantras*, he quotes *Shyama rahasya*, *Rudrayamala* and *Viswasabatantra*. However, none of the notable *tantras* popular in the Tara and Kali kula are mentioned. It is evident, that Nigamananda is keen to establish the entire *tantric* tradition on Vedantic lines. The book has a chapter on *Brahmavada*, and the only *tantric* text he uses for this is *Mahanirvana Tantra*.

The second text that we consider as a part of our investigation in this part is by Panchkari Bandyopadhyay. In an article named *Banglar tantra* published in *Prabahini* in 1929, Panchkari equates *tantra* with Bengali nationalism in the very introduction through a deft identification strategy. He states that the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement inspired Bengalis to turn from their imitative ways of the earlier century towards their own culture. Although this trend was often ridiculed by various names, it brought them closer to their roots. He then says:

Is there not a true Bengali in your land? Look close, you have women's rights, marriage of young women, widow marriage, joint feast of allcastes, worship of the formless divinity. But those there are closely associated with Benagali clothes, food and customs. If you want to revive that which are truly Bengali, all the things mentioned above, try to understand Bengali Vaishnavism, sahajiya and *tantra*. Closely studying these sects, texts and customs you will realize that everyone from Sureshchandra to Keshab Chandra has repackaged what was already here in a foreign garb and sold it back to us. (Bandopadhyay 108)

And this identification goes on throughout this article. Regarding literature, for example, he would conclude that :

The more you read *tantra*, the more you realize that *tantra* is the original creed of Bengal. (Bandopadhyay 109)

In another article by the same author, named ‘idol worship in *Tantra*’, he tries to establish the monism that we have noted above, when he states:

The thought element in Upanishads and *Devisukta*, which states that I am all, it is from me that all there is – is the base on which the structure of *tantra* has been constructed. Christian theism is a protest to that thought, which finally suppresses that. A theism which states that there is a being who is stronger, older, more willing, more gracious and generous and in all respects greater than me – that is God. (Bandopadhyay 269)

Both texts reveal that there is something new and interesting that is going on in this refashioning of the *tantra* within the Bengali cultural sphere. Julien Strube points out how this new reformed *tantric* texts were geared with a three pronged agenda. It wrote directly against the missionaries, the Vedantic bias of the Brahmo Samaj and also addressed itself to the Theosophists, to whom it said that there is a more grounded counterpart of the concocted ‘esoteric’ school of Madam Blavatsky. And two contrary turn are simultaneously deployed. First, there is a movement towards an universalism by stating that initiates all are same. Sadhakas are not defined by religious and national boundaries, whereby *tantra* can be a basis of universalism. There is a wide Catholicism in the spirit of this exposition. On the other hand, there is a strong nationalist spirit which states that whatever we take as Western knowledge like egalitarianism, scientism and rational thinking of the deepest kind have already been explored in the *tantric* texts. So, if Indians look at their own tradition without looking outside then they will find an answer for the questions that they are asking. Thus, *tantric* texts were also laying the foundation for a nationalist cause.

For many in the West, this was the beginning of a new understanding of *Tantra*. It was closely connected with the rise of interest in esoteric knowledge in the West itself from the beginning of the twentieth century, where the theosophists may have contributed. The

mystically constructed Irish nationalism could be a prototype to study the relationship between *tantra* and Indian nationalism too. All these meant that a section of the Western intelligentsia has prepared to engage with *tantra* in a more involved manner. The *Tantric Order of America* was established and in 1905 has brought out its journal. In the fifth edition of that journal, they provided of an entire compendium of quotations that reveal two to three things:

- i. There are clear links between Western esoteric knowledge and practice, and the Indian *tantra*.
- ii. *Tantra* is certified by the Veda as is valid as a *Smarta* tradition
- iii. The Western engagement in *tantra* is widespread, and noted philosophers, thinkers and literary figures display an active interest in it.

In this rich cultural atmosphere, emerges the mysterious figure of Arthur Avalon, and a translation of the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, the first *tantra* to be translated into English and one that the West came to know in its entirety, through a translation with a magnificent introduction in 1913.

Arthur Avalon and the translation of the *Mahanirvana Tantra*

We have, till now, engaged in an overview of the *umwelt* within which the text came to be translated. In this section we will *innenwelt* of *tantra*. This has a diachrony that is somewhat, though not exclusively, independent of its *umwelt*. This difference can be understood typologically, since *tantra* is so much devoted towards the *innenwelt* of the practitioner, through which *umwelt* is then described. It prioritizes an inside out structure. It is with this world, the inside world of the *tantra*, that we will deal with in this section.

Hiroki Watanabe has extensively worked on the textual history of *Mahanirvana Tantra*, and he concludes that the text is full of ambiguities. (Watanabe 1060) First, the second part of the text, though mentioned in almost all editions of the translation and commentaries and referred to in the first part of the text, is never actually found. Arthur Avalon, in his translation of the text in 1913, which is the first English translation of the text (a second prose translation appeared as late as in 1970) mentions that he has seen a copy of

the second half with a Nepali pundit but he was reluctant to part with it. This is, however, just the beginning of the problem. We will arrive at them as we go along, but it is important that we come to know who Arthur Avalon was. Arthur Avalon was long believed to be the pseudonym of Sir John Woodrow, judge at the Calcutta High Court who worked with local pundits and experts to bring out the edition. In a thesis in 1998, Kathleen Taylor proved categorically how it is a pseudonym shared by two writers Sir John Woodrow and Atal Bihari Ghosh. Her thesis has in fact unraveled within the translation the two separate voices of Woodrow and Das which was made possible because Woodrow himself has many publications exclusively to his name. (Taylor 14)

Secondly, within the corpus of the *tantric* tradition, *Mahanirvana Tantra* holds a unique place. Not much is heard about the text before the 18th century, although we have already seen that both Nigamananda in 1906 and Panchkari Bandopadhyay 1908 consider it to be an ancient and authoritative *tantra* text. Panchkari Bandopadhyay goes so far as to attest that the Brahmo dharma is nothing but a structure derived out of a small portion of the *Mahanirvana tantram* devoted to the worship of the brahman. He was sharing a common sentiment. The text was used profusely by Raja Rammohun Roy in his polemic against Brahminical orthodoxy to justify the tradition of worship of the *Brahman*. He often resorted to the ‘ancient authority of the Mahanirvan’. This was also the text to which he took recourse in his support of widow remarriage. Due to its lack of mention in old records, there has been a widespread idea that this *tantric* text is a fabrication of Raja Rammohun Roy himself, who not only provided the text but also created a myth of a second part which could not be published. However, that may not be true, and the authorship is often ascribed to Hariharananda Bharati, who was Rammohun’s guru in Varanasai and from whom it is commonly believed that he received some sort of a *tantric* initiation. Along with the text, there is a debate regarding the author of its commentary as well. All translations take into account the commentary of Jaganmohan Tarkalankar, but who is he? Is there a single Jaganmohan Tarkalankar, or are there two as Arthur Avalon states? So the water becomes only too murky. In this section we will try to look at the various controversies related to the text and then come to its translation project.

Much of the complications arise from the fact that the *tantra* is radically different from all other *tantras* in its general construction, theology, its commitment to jurisprudence and intensive borrowing from shastric texts, upholding of the caste system in everyday life and finally in its comparative study of shakti worship in other parts of the world like Babylon and Egypt. Hugh Urban felt that ‘the text is really something of a double edged sword that accomplishes a two-fold task. Not only does it attempt to reinterpret certain aspects of Indian culture according to the model of the *tantras*, but it also attempts to relegitimize the *Tantric* tradition in light of a reformed modernized Hinduism. (Urban 70)

As we take a closer look at its *innenwelt*, we find that the text unfolds like most *tantras*, as a conversation between Siva and Parvati regarding the dismal situation of the world where mortals are haunted by sorrow, and the way to free from it. Siva customarily replies, and this is also usual, that *tantra* is the only way in the modern iron age or ‘kali yuga’ to liberate oneself. The ancient Vedic rituals are both impossible to carry out and fruitless in terms of efficacy in modern age. And therefore, with the noble intention of freeing mankind, he is revealing the secret doctrine of the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, which he has held a close secret till then out of love and compassion to his beloved Parvati, so that men who know it can be liberated. There nothing much here that is different from other *tantras*. It is a formulaic beginning. The differences start to appear from the third chapter, which establishes the formless Brahman as the supreme deity of whom the gods and goddesses are only manifestations. This strain continues throughout the *tantra*. It is not sectarian in the sense that it is not devoted to a particular deity but towards a formless eternal divinity, the Brahman – which agreed well both with the British and the reformed Hindus alike. This is unique when it comes to *tantric* texts, which are usually sectarian in the sense that they are generally ascribed to various kulas depending on the deity, the *Srikula*, *Nathkula*, *Kalikula* and *Tarakula* being the major streams. In *Mahanirvatantra* Kali, or adyakali as the shakti deity, appears only in the seventh chapter and here too the bhakti representation is prioritized over the fearsome aspect as found in some of the other sectarian *tantras*. Its description of ‘adyakali’, its chief deity is remarkably different from other *tantras*. The famous *ka-kar-kuta stotra* that appears in the seventh chapter of this *tantra* abounds in devotion, and the pleasant and beautiful aspect of the devi is prioritized over her fearsome and destructice aspect.

The rituals here are highly sanitized, to a degree that at least one Brahmin pundit referred to it as a ‘woman’s *tantra*’. (Urban 72) The dreaded five Ms of *tantric* rites, which has been the greatest point of disgust and disagreement among the reformed Bengali Hindus have been only summarily dealt with here. The fifth M, the maithuna is only hinted at in one line through an euphemism. Moreover, it is also said that the rite is best carried out only with one’s legal spouse. This was a great departure from earlier *tantras*.

The most interesting matter in the *tantra* is the long time it invests in matters which are distinctly un-*tantric*, matters related to marriage, caste system, social duties and laws of inheritance. There are direct references to the *dayabhaga* and the *manusmriti*, and there are some noted differences in matters of inheritance with these earlier texts. The laws of *Mahanirvana Tantra* have a striking resemblance with the reformed inheritance laws that the British administration introduced in 1775, but changed again in 1782. It has lead many, like Derrett to conclude that it was written somewhere between 1775 and 1782. Derrett convincingly argues that if not the whole, then at least part of it was written in commensuration with the ‘changes made in the British legal system between 1773 and 1782’. (Derrett 141) Manuscripts of this *tantra* were few and far between, and not present with any of the traditional sampradayas, but Rammohun Roy’s personal library had two copies and the Brahmo Samaj library had one. The first printed copy was by the Adi Brahmo Samaj Press.

Regarding the significance of this *tantra* Panchkari Bandopadhyay states, ‘our land of Bengal used to be ruled by Tantrik works such as Saradatilaka...Pranatosini, *Tantrasara* etc. then the Mahanirvana *Tantra* did not have so great influence. Considering the form into which, as a result of English education, the mind ...of the Bengali has been shaped the Mahanirvana is a proper *Tantra* for the time. The Mahanirvanatantra alone is fit for the country at the present time’. And it was this *tantra* that Avalon selected as the best representative of the zeit geist. Internally, it was well adopted to suit the spirit, externally it was perfectly representative of the spirit of neo nationalism being refashioned in *tantric* lines. The growing importance of this text is clear from Avalon’s own words in his preface to his 1913 translation, which also sheds important light to the translation history of this text:

It was first published by the Adi-Brahma-Samaja in 1798 Shakabda (A.D. 1876), and was printed in Bengali characters, with the notes of the Kulavadhuta Shrimad

Hariharananda Bharati under the editorship of Anandachandra Vidyavagisha. The preface to this edition stated that three MSS. were consulted; one belonging to the library of the Samaja; the second supplied by Durgadasa Chandhuri, and the third taken from the library of Raja Ram Mohun Roy. This text appears to be the basis of subsequent publications. It was again printed in 1888 by Shri Krishna Gopala Bhakta, since when there have been several editions with Bengali translations, including that of Shri Prasanna Kumara Shastri. The late Pandit Jivananda Vidyasagara published an edition in Devanagari character, with the notes of Hariharananda; and the Venkateshvara Press at Bombay have issued another in similar character with a Hindi translation. (Avalon 7)

The Mahanirvana *Tantra* thus inhabited a liminal space between two semiospheres that were trying to engage in dialogism. To the East it took on a revisionist signification on the basis of which political activism can be generated, to the West it was commensurate with Avalon's corrective to the Western way of looking at the Hindu *tantras*. And finally in 1913, it got translated and published by the name of Arthur Avalon.

The *tantra* soon gained popularity in the West, largely because of the high connection of Sir John Woodroffe. Among his acquaintances was John Rothschild. He knew about the *tantra*, carried the text with him, and may have played a role in popularizing it in the West. Yeats knew about the text, although the Upanishadas and the Yoga Sutras were closer to his heart. Yeats was not a systematic reader of *tantra*, but he took whatever attracted him. Grevel Lindop mentions how the *Vision 2* has parts woven into it that were taken from the Mahanirvana. Avalon's introduction includes a long description of the meru, which is reflected in Yeats poem by the same name. In India, however, the debate around its authorship and commentary continued.

This popularity, however, did not do away with the controversy that surrounded its commentary. Arthur Avalon states in his introduction that the commentary he follows is of Briddha jaganmohan Tarkalankar. He then goes on to state that the moniker 'Brddha' has been used in the form of disambiguation. In Avalon's own words:

The edition which has been used for the translation is that (now out of print) edited and published at Calcutta by Shri Krishna Gopala Bhakta in Chaitra 1295 Bengali era (April, 1888), with Commentary of Shrimad Hariharananda Bharati, and with additional notes by the learned and lately deceased Pandit Jaganmohana Tarkalankara, called Vriddha in order to distinguish him from another celebrated Pandit of the same name. A new edition of the same work is now, in course of publication, with further notes by the latter's son, Pandit Jnanendranatha Tantraratna. (MT 6)

Jnanendranath Tantraratna, however, has himself debated this contention. He has stated in his introduction to the text:

We have already received in English a translation of Mahanirvana *Tantra*. Its translator goes by the name of Arthur Avalon. It is the translation of the earlier edition of the present edition along with the commentary of late Jaganmohar Tarkalankar. In the said translation, the translator has written in the preface that he has taken as his source the text and commentary of late Vriddha Jaganmohan Tarkalankar...but in reality there existed no other pundit by the name of Jaganmohan Tarkalankar. The same person is the translator and commentator of the present volume'. (*Mahanirvana Tantra* ii)

The reason why John Woodrow wanted to establish Jaganmohan Tarkalankar as two personalities is unclear. It is clear that multiple translations of the Mahanirvana *tantra* already existed in Bengali, and at least one in Hindi, by the time Avalon brought out his translation. It is clearly understandable now how a little heard of *tantric* text rose to ascendance under changing condition of the semiosphere it inhabited. However, what is important is that this *tantra* was now solidly placed in the corpus of *tantric* texts. The *innenwelt* suited the *umwelt*, and the semiosphere was redefined, and redefined in the term of 'positive Orientalism'.

A Text as a Sign: Positive Orientalism?

Tapati Guha Thakurta divides the evolution of Orientalism into two parts, an old Orientalism and a new Orientalism. (Guha Thakurta 8) Although it largely featured in painting with the changing perception towards Indian art among English connoisseurs among whom E.V.

Havell plays an important part, its effect was felt throughout the cultural sphere of Bengal. Sir John Woodroffe was close to Abanindranath Tagore, A.V. Coomaraswamy and the entire Bengal School painters. It is evident that within the rise of a new nationalism, *tantra* was re-orienting itself. While the early Orientalists largely engaged with the *Vedas* and the *Upanishadas*, the *Bhagwat Geeta* as well the literary works of mostly Kalidasa; the new Orientalism was woven around the *tantric* texts. Thus what was extraneous and marginal in the semiosphere of the early 19th century, now took a turnover and became central in the early 20th century, albeit through re-fashionings that were already discussed. *Mahanirvana Tantra* became more than a text, it became a sign that metonymically brought together as a cultural aggregate of all the movements and sentiments of this time, resulting in its translation and growing acceptance.

Kathleen Taylor calls this positive Orientalism, which was developed to remedy the evils brought about by the first spate of Orientalism in the late 18th and early 19th century. The chief evils that were identified in the earlier movement, and which were bolstered by the introduction of 'Western Education' in the 1830s, were, as Sumit Sarkar points out – denationalizing, alienation of education from religion, and making Indians servants of the Raj and imitators of the West. (Sarkar 154) Sarkar states how The general belief was that the texts for translations were chosen to consolidate this structure of supremacy. The new Positive Orientalism was constructed as a corrective. The return of the *tantra* was an important role to conjure a nationalist spirit and validate the growth of nationalism on the platform of activism. In this changed semiosphere, the translation of texts which were thought hitherto considered irrelevant, came about. *Mahanirvana Tantra* was one of the foremost in this regard.

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The Way to the Heart through the Stomach:**Reading Communication as Cannibalism in *The Lunchbox* and *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi***Sambhabi Ghosh¹**Abstract:**

In this paper, I would like to explore the communication that can be enacted using the language of food, and the symbolic cannibalism in the process of understanding such language, through Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* (2013) and Masakazu Fukatsu's *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* (*Dad's Lunch Box* 2017). The language of the food (*what* one eats) is intrinsically bound up with *how* one eats (the consumption) and how one *prepares* what is to be eaten (the communication) and their interaction is crucial to the recognition that "understanding is still an assimilation" (Birnbaum and Olsson). Such assimilation facilitates what Derrida calls an "infinite hospitality" (Derrida 282)—a continuous two-way nourishment of understanding the others, as well as giving oneself to be understood by the others, using "the very notion of comprehending as an act of incorporation" (Birnbaum and Olsson). I would also like to extend this idea into the relationship of the audience with film itself—in their consumption of characters, the stories, and the cultures represented—geared towards a back-and-forth nourishment between addresser and addressee.

Keywords: food, cannibalism, function of language, Derrida, Jakobson

Novalis, in what would seem like a bizarre supposition, speaks of friendship as a form of cannibalistic assimilation. He writes:

All spiritual pleasure can be expressed through eating. In friendship, one really eats of the friend, or feeds on him. It is a genuine trope to substitute the body for the spirit – and, at a commemorative dinner for a friend, to enjoy, with bold, supersensual imagination, his flesh in every bite, and his blood in every gulp. (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson)

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While this may sound barbaric, one cannot ignore its resemblance to the consumption of bread and wine as Christ's body and blood. It is a rite that is largely believed to "enhance and deepen the communion of believers not only with Christ but also with one another" ("Eucharist")—an action in which one is not only 'consuming' Christ, as it may seem, but also their fellow Christians, for a deeper communion. Such cannibalistic consumption is rooted in more than just the physical eating of flesh and blood. It is associated with a larger discourse of understanding and assimilation. One is always consuming another. In our bid to understand communication, we are consuming words spoken from an orifice (the mouth) via another orifice (the ears), and assimilating them in our brains to take cognizance of any meaning that they might bear within a particular code. This transfer in between orifices that partake of a common body (language) enables us to consume and understand, as Kelly Oliver, in her reading of Derrida, points out: "All forms of identification and assimilation in relations to the Other (language, meaning, and so forth) and others (including animals, plants, rocks, and so forth) are literal and/or metaphorical forms of eating." (Oliver 460) This further reinforces Novalis' pronouncement that all "taking in" is eating, which brings us to his equation of spiritual pleasure with consumption (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson). Conversations, friendships, education, knowledge, aesthetic, and art are all things, amongst many others, that enrich and please our spirit—these are all enjoyments in which we "feed on" what is produced by another as well as "eat of" another person. And the consumption of literal food, its language, and the subsequent cannibalism fits neatly within this purview.

The preparation and presentation of food—the culinary arts, as it is called—is an art form that is known to bring spiritual pleasure to those practicing as well as to those consuming. Like any art form, it has its own system of syntax and semantics. Rules and practices related to the sequence of eating, postures, seating arrangements, use of hands or utensils as well as those associated with the cooking of food and their aesthetic presentation point to the specific linguistic code that food is embedded in. How does this language of food facilitate communication, and the subsequent cannibalism, in terms of understanding and comprehension? For that, one can hark back to Jakobson's functions of language. They include the Emotive function from the side of the addresser, the Conative function on the side of the addressee, the Referential function on part of the context, the Poetic function or the

message itself, the Metalinguistic function and the Phatic function.¹ It is understood that these functions relate mostly to poetry, literature, and to verbal communication (although not exclusively), where a speaker and a listener exist. However, it is possible to extend these functions to consumption as well, where a giver and a receiver exist. *What* we eat (language that is exchanged between orifices) is intrinsically bound up with *how* we eat (consumption) and how it is *prepared* for eating (communication). Additionally, the message (food) is largely influenced by the relationship between the addresser (maker/cook) and the addressee (eater). The communication between a parent and child would be markedly different from that between partners and would thus require their message to be specially crafted with relation to the linguistic code it is part of—in the same way that the poetic function influences the structure of the language around it. This opens up the possibility of what Derrida understands as an “infinite hospitality” (Derrida 282). Eating, according to Derrida, must be a two-way process, whereby the eater does not only selfishly nourish themselves but also provides the possibility for the other to gain nourishment. Language acts in a similar manner in which the addresser and the addressee seek to enrich each other by understanding the messages that pass through a common communication channel; it is in this way that one is “*learning and giving to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat*” (Derrida 282). In many cultures, cannibalism is practiced somewhat along the same principles—while it nourishes the receiving body (the Self), it also pays homage and respect to the giver (the Other). On the other hand, the giver lends itself to be consumed, as the receiver opens itself up for that incorporation. Food, too, helps perform a similar function, where the communication operates in a nexus. First, the relationship between the addresser and the addressee is established along the registers of kinship, seniority, marital status, and such others. Secondly, the addresser understands the personhood of the addressee and constructs a message (i.e., food) according to the response they wish to receive from them through the consumption of this message. For example, a person could make the addressee’s favourite food on a special occasion to convey their affection towards the person, hoping for the message to elicit joy and satisfaction on the part of the receiver. On the other end, the addressee deciphers this received message – given that it follows a recognizable code—and performs an equally expressive non-verbal action on the basis of the personhood of the addressor and communicates it for their consumption. Thus, the addressee would perhaps choose to finish the food entirely, a message that, when

consumed by the addresser, would indicate that their efforts evoked the desired response in the addressee. The giver and the receiver then are able to assimilate one another through a spiritual enjoyment of the literal consumption of food and a figurative consumption of each other. *The Lunchbox* and *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* explore the various ways in which the consumption of food, as a substitute to the exchange of words in between orifices, facilitates the consumption of one another in a symbolic cannibalism.

Masakazu Fukatsu's *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* (*Dad's Lunch Box*, 2017) explores the relationship between a father and his daughter through food and eating. The film starts with literal food as well as with allusions to eating. It begins with the frame of a man drinking from a cup and telling someone to take care of themselves. As this person, a woman, gets up from her seat, she tells the man, "Look after Midori. She has a weak constitution. Her diet needs...". She is unable to finish as the man strongly asserts that he knows and will do the needful (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:00:01 – 00:00:40). This begins Mr. Otsu's heart-rending journey towards taking care of Midori, his daughter, through one of the most difficult jobs of his life—making her *bentō*. In Japan, *bentō* is typically a packed lunch that is carried by students to their schools, employees to their offices, as well as by people on their outings.² These *bentō* boxes have specific preparation and presentation techniques, generally prepared by the mother (or the woman) of the household—a language that Otsu is completely unaware of, wherein begins his journey of understanding the language of the *bentō* and communicating in it. This brings with it a reformulation of the registers of kinship between Otsu and Midori—Otsu now has to replace the absent mother in Midori's life by taking on the role of the caretaker and the *bentō* maker. On the other hand, Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* follows the lives of Ila and Saajan who come in contact with each other when Ila's *dabba*,³ meant for her husband Rajiv, is mistakenly taken to Saajan, and this soon culminates into a unique interaction. The story begins with Ila who, on realizing that her *dabba* has gone to the wrong address, writes an explanation to Saajan, the unwitting receiver of the lunchbox. She thanks him for returning the *dabba* empty and explains that it was in fact meant for her husband. She adds a further detail about how she spent a few expectant hours in the hopes that her husband would praise her cooking. Having failed the first attempt, she tries again, this time cooking Rajiv's favourite food, *paneer* or cottage cheese (*The Lunchbox*, 00:20:50 –

00:21:20). The *dabbawalas* mistake (or is it?) again brings Ila's food to Saajan—food that is meant for Rajiv. This opens up a new communication channel between our two protagonists. From then onwards, the *dabbas* begin to be accompanied by letters where they exchange details about their lives—a beginning of an “infinite hospitality” (Derrida 282). Saajan learns about Ila's yearning for her husband's love; Ila recognizes Saajan's loneliness following his wife's death. With such a turn of events, the relationship between Ila and Saajan is unconsciously reformulated—they both have to act, not as a replacement, but as a substitute, to each other's partners. These reformulations directly impact the nature of the communication enacted through food. The presence and the absence of food in the lunchbox remains the poetic function in both the films, while the metalinguistic code around it adjusts accordingly. The filled tiffin from the side of the addresser (emotive) carries with it the affections that are reciprocated through the empty tiffin box from the side of the addressee (conative), as the existing registers of kinship shift. Otsu's initial failure to reach out to Midori was rooted in his inability to understand the language of the *bentō*—they were unable to communicate because of their inability to understand each other's metalinguistic code. A *bentō* meant for students is generally expected to be in colourful or cute lunchboxes—with the youngster attraction to the Japanese *kawaii* culture⁴—with equally colourful food inside. Hence, *bentō* can be made with as many ingredients as desired, but they must be filling. However, the catch with *bentō* is that they should be filled with food that has been cooled down. Since they are prepared much earlier and are consumed later in the afternoon, the *bentō* must have food that tastes good even when cold. Unaware of these specificities, Otsu fails to communicate to his daughter his message of affection through his insipid food, which causes further estrangement between the two. It takes an intervention from a female colleague and late night video tutorials for Otsu to readjust the metalinguistic code he wishes to embed his *bentō* in, to further connect and communicate with his daughter. A similar readjustment occurs between Ila and Saajan. On receiving the *dabba* and the letter from Ila for the second time, Saajan writes back, “Ila, the food was very salty today” (*The Lunchbox* 00:22:10 – 00:22:50). While there is nothing necessarily wrong in this trite response, this is not something Ila would want if the addresser was her husband. As a sign of her disapproval, she cooks extremely spicy food the next day, which helps Saajan give his thoughts a few more words, effectively changing their respective communication methods. In this changed

metalinguistic codes, the incorporation of food translates into a gradual incorporation of one another. It enacts a journey—from the stomach to the heart—of cannibalism through communication, of protagonists who “eats of a friend, or feeds on him” in a bid to comprehend one another (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson).

The beauty of *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* (2017) lies in such a journey that both Otsu and Midori undertake. Otsu does not simply give Midori food to eat. He gives himself to be understood—that he is trying to love, care, and form a meaningful relationship with his daughter, as a replacement of the mother. It is also a journey where Midori too gives herself to be understood—that she appreciates and respects the effort that her father is putting into her well-being. It is also a journey where they gradually come to understand each other in a circumstance where barely any words are exchanged. They are only ever able to explain themselves through the making and consumption of literal food. This process of understanding begins at the moment when Otsu starts making Midori’s *bentō*, but it is tasteless and colourless. Despite these obvious drawbacks, Midori finishes her tiffin entirely. When Otsu comments in surprise, “But you ate it all”, Midori casually says, “What could I do?” (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:07:45 – 00:07:55). While it does not seem to have any obvious significance, I think the importance of this scene becomes evident at a later point that involves Midori’s boyfriend. Infatuated by the stirrings of a first love, Midori wanted to make sure that her boyfriend also ate proper lunch instead of eating bread at a kiosk. She requests her father, who has achieved some level of proficiency in the culinary arts, to make her two lunchboxes. Undoubtedly, she lies about the identity of the second lunch enthusiast, claiming that it is a friend who is a fan of her father’s cooking. Delighted, Otsu does everything Midori asks of him, including adding more meat to the lunches or skipping eggplant. However, on one occasion, the boyfriend does not finish the lunch and returns a full *bentō* to Midori, citing a lack of time. To which, Midori says, “[d]on’t leave Dad’s lunch”, and eats the lunch herself (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:44:00 – 00:45:40). This happens on another occasion, when she discovers her boyfriend cheating on her. She takes both *bentō* boxes to school, and her friends help her finish the lunches as she gradually tears up. What is significant about that moment of returning a filled *bentō*? The answer lies in Midori’s calling it “dad’s lunch”. It is the same reason she finished even the most burnt omelets. By “dad’s lunch”, Midori does not

simply mean a lunch made by her dad—it is an extension of her father. By finishing the food, no matter how flavorless, or how large the quantity, Midori showed respect towards Otsu.⁵ In the complete consumption of the *bentō*, Midori expresses her gratitude towards Otsu who, in the absence of the mother, was trying his best to take care of Midori, whether by staying up late at night to learn cooking, or taking advice from a female colleague, or by shopping for groceries on his way back home. In consuming the *bentō*, Midori not only eats of the cooked food, but also feeds on her father's affection towards her, which helps her understand him better. The emotive function in Otsu's *bentō* is reciprocated by Midori through her praises and her finished lunches. However, this communication channel that Midori builds through the *bentō* is also her way of giving herself to be understood by her father, which Otsu is unable to decipher initially. He is not able to feed on or eat of Midori's affections in the empty *bentō* boxes—he simply assumes that it was because she liked the food—and is thus unable to understand her. This is where the language of food differs significantly from verbal communication. Otsu cannot employ the phatic function of Jakobson's model to test if their communication channel is functional. He can only continue to make his *bentō*, through a continued process of trial and error, hoping that the message will stir the desired response in the addressee. It is not until Midori asks her father to stop making the second *bentō* that Otsu understands what was happening in the silences of Midori's words. He listens to her crying to bed that night. (*Papa no Obentō*, 00:50:15 – 00:52:30). That moment opens up a new channel of communication and consumption. The words that Otsu and Midori could not exchange in verbal speech come to be compiled in notes that accompany her *bentō*. Even his wish for her seventeenth birthday is spelt out on her food with seaweed. This new communication takes its ultimate form in the final few sequences. Otsu, saddened by Midori's graduation bringing his *bentō* routine to a halt, writes her a heartfelt letter expressing love and gratitude for the last three years of Midori enjoying his cooking. The words bring tears to Midori's eyes as she begins eating her food and praising it as delicious. In return, Midori too puts a letter in the lunchbox, expressing her gratitude, and naming her father's *bentō* the best in the world. The film then continues to show an adult Midori, who is heading off to university, make her first ever *bentō* for her father. Otsu then goes to the roof of his office and enjoys the meal while verbally praising the taste (*Papa no Obentō*, 01:04:00 – 01:10:20). The emotive and conative functions of this non-verbal communication between Otsu and Midori operate on the

recognition that the *bentō* is not simply a box of food, but a repository of emotions, thereby making the message (poetic function) of love, affection, and respect easier to decipher. For both, the *bentō* is an extension of their personhood; the consumption of which entailed a consumption of each other. It is this mutual feeding, a symbolic cannibalism, that opens up the path of their comprehension of each other, through the language of the *bentō* itself.

A nested sequence of such symbolic cannibalisms is characteristic of *The Lunchbox*. It operates on multiple reformulations of relationships and communication, all of which unfold through the language of the literal food. This nested chain begins with Mrs. Deshpande, the resident who lives on the floor above Ila. The curious Mrs. Deshpande never physically appears on the screen; instead we are greeted by Bharati Achrekar's inimitable voice. We are told that her husband is in a coma for the last fifteen years, and has been staring at an Orient ceiling fan the whole time. Mrs. Deshpande is of the opinion that his life is stuck in the fan, and gets herself an electric generator to keep the fan running. While the parallel between Mrs. Deshpande and Ila's mother, desperately feeding on whatever remains of their husbands, is obvious, another level of consumption opens up⁶—that between Mrs. Deshpande and Ila. Their relationship functions only through food—Mrs. Deshpande sends Ila ingredients in a basket hung through the window and tells her how to win her husband's heart; she also guides her in responding to Saajan, while playing tapes that Ila wants to listen to. In this relationship, Ila eats of Mrs. Deshpande through her ingredients, her suggestions about cooking and winning the love of a husband, and her guidance, whereby Mrs. Deshpande acts as the substitute for a mother. Mrs. Deshpande, on the other hand, feeds on Ila's affection, her obedience, and her willingness to listen to her, where Ila becomes a substitute for a daughter. This mutual feeding on and eating of seeks to fill up the insatiable void inside both these women, imprisoned in loveless households.

This cannibalistic communication between Ila and Mrs. Deshpande contributes to the next sequence—that between Ila and Saajan. It is under Mrs. Deshpande's advice that Ila sends the first letter—as Mrs. Deshpande says, “Thank you *toh banta hai na*” (You should thank him) (*The Lunchbox*, 00:21:20 – 00:21:30). It is this letter that shapes the new registers of kinship between Ila and Saajan—that of substitute partners. With passing time and letters, both Ila and Saajan begin understanding each other's metalinguistic code—a communication

that takes the form of a mutual feeding on and eating of. Saajan here eats of Ila's *dabba*, but also feeds on her story and perhaps a companionship. Ila too eats of Saajan's company to replace the emptiness left in the absence of her husband, while simultaneously feeding on the validation of having someone return her *dabba* empty. This mutual feeding is perhaps most explicit in the scene with Ila's mother, grieving her husband's passing away (*The Lunchbox*, 01:27:10 – 01:28:10). "Ab sirf bhok lag rahi hain" (now, I'm hungry, that's all)—these words from her at the time that the corpse of her husband is being tended to might seem socially incongruent, but it has a deeper meaning to it; a way for her to grieve her husband and the vacuum that she had been feeling in her life in the absence of love as well as the loss of a communication. With these words, she explains the relationship between her husband and her—they were deeply in love when Ila was born, but with her husband's growing ill health, the daily routine of taking care of a semi-vegetative patient made her significant other despicable to her. There was no longer any mutual feeding as her mother continued to give her all to someone who no longer responded equally. While Ila's mother continued to care for her father and tend to his needs, she learnt of him and gave to him, but there was no reciprocation from her husband's end—perhaps, this draws a parallel to Ila's own collapsing marriage. Her mother's apparent ramblings simply highlight the complete end of any possibility for her to eat of and feed on someone's affection or love. The hunger arises out of her inability to both give herself to be fed on, or feed on someone else—a hunger that makes Ila understand the impossibility of a future with Rajiv, a moment where she recognizes the failure of the phatic function to keep their communication going.

This communication between Ila and Saajan branches out into another symbolic cannibalism between Saajan and his new colleague, Sheikh. Sheikh is a new employee at Saajan's firm, meant to replace Saajan when he retires. Saajan continues to ignore and avoid Sheikh who is the constant reminder of his imminent end of work life. Through a few moments of indignation and reconciliation, however, they soon learn to work with each other, to the point that Sheikh begins to share Saajan's lunch. This, of course, poses a pertinent question—what is the cannibalistic relation between Sheikh and Ila? Does Sheikh too have to act as Ila's substitute husband, if he is also partaking of the same food as Saajan? The answer is in the negative. The communication between Sheikh and Saajan directly takes on Novalis'

idea of the spiritual pleasure of friendship and the assimilation of the friend. Sheikh's partaking of Saajan's food opens up another layer of mutual feeding – he is eating of Saajan's tiffin and feeding on Saajan's experience in the office; Saajan is eating of Sheikh's labour and feeding on his company. However, his comprehension of Ila differs from that of Saajan. The code within which Ila and Saajan have been communicating is unknown to Sheikh, but not altogether unfamiliar. He does not understand the language infused in Ila's cooking—a language directed specifically towards Saajan—but he eventually equates it with his relationship with his fiancée. That is why when Saajan claims that he has a girlfriend named Ila, Sheikh finds no issue in assuming that she is the marvelous cook who feeds them both. For Ila and Sheikh, the symbolic cannibalism lies in their feeding on and eating of a common body, that of Saajan.

The shifting registers of kinship in *The Lunchbox* bring us to a crucial difference between the two films. In *Papa no Obentō*, the reformulation of the relationship between Otsu and Midori continue to function along the familiar registers of guardian-ward bond. The symbolic cannibalism here seeks to strengthen the existing affection between the two. *The Lunchbox*, however, makes it difficult to categorize any of the new relationships. Are Saajan and Ila lovers? Is Mrs. Deshpande acting as the mother when she helps set off the chain of these cannibalisms with the first letter? Does Sheikh, as an orphan, think of Saajan as a father figure, to the extent that he invites Saajan to his wedding as a substitute for his family? Where does that put his relationship with Ila, if any? Questions abound in our inability to name the registers of these kinships. And yet, the realism of these films is not lost on us—beyond the known registers of connections, we regularly interact with the world through assimilation and consumption, of our surroundings and of one another.

Such symbolic cannibalisms also extend beyond the narratives of the films and to the existence of cinema as an industry. The industry feeds on an urban, educated, young audience who are expected to eat of films designed specifically to suit their tastes. This too operates on a nested sequence of interactions. By keeping the audience in mind, the filmmakers create films that are decipherable by the viewers, putting them within a recognizable linguistic code. On the other hand, the audience understands the stories, characters, cultures, and perspectives, and assimilates them through their ability to relate to the narrative unfolding

before them. Although every person may take away a different meaning from the product, every new interpretation adds on to the subsequent viewings—thus consuming multiple meanings. From the other end, filming techniques of editing, point-of-view shots, and the invisible fourth wall consume the audience, allowing them an escape from their routine tribulations, which keeps the audience coming back for more. This chain of comprehension feeds into the larger structure of the industry that reorients itself according to the need of its primary consumers in order to keep the machinery functional and relevant. To that end, films often take the existing repertoire of significations and modify them to suit the tastes of changing times. *Papa no Obentō wa Sekai Ichi* takes the typical slice-of-life family narrative and situates it within contemporary concerns of single parenthood, familial schism, and teenage apprehensions. *The Lunchbox* takes the predictable tropes of a hetero-romantic story and does away with all of its stereotypical characterizations and larger-than-life melodramatic narrative. These stories then consume of the world that exists outside and incorporates such narratives to make it more palatable within a functional communication channel between addresser and addressee.⁷

Derrida points out a difference in the methods of consumption between human and animals in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. He says, "Animals have a negative relation to the object because they simply swallow it. Human negativity, however, is reflected: man does not in fact devour the object, but rather incorporates it abstractly, and thereby creates the inner space that is the subject." (Birnbaum and Olsson) The object consumed gains its meaning through our consumption, and this consumption gives us our consciousness—the Self in relation to the Other. Because of this, it doesn't matter what one eats (as all things are to be consumed to be understood), but what matters is that one is "eating well". And such eating well is embedded in "respect for the other at the very moment when, in experience one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, understood ideally..." (Derrida 283). These cannibalisms do not entail a complete consumption of the Other into the Self, neither does it constitute a silencing of the Other. Such cannibalisms, when done respectfully and not as "merely a habit", contributes to our perception of the world and of others (Oliver 462). Otsu and Midori as well as Ila and Saajan do not devour one another negatively as would an animal; instead they create a space in which they are able to meditate on their

consumption and understand others, as well as give themselves to be consumed in the same way and be understood. And the object that allows for such self-consciousness to be facilitated is literal food—a language that is not only limited to humans, but takes on multiple codes depending on the communication channel and speakers.

Endnotes

¹ For further reading, see essays by Roman Jakobson in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge, pp. 31-61

² *Bentō* can be of different types, depending on the purpose, place of sale, and consumer. Generally, *bentō* carries rice or noodles, grilled or simmered fish and meat, or fried items along with vegetables and omelet.

³ The *dabba* or the lunchbox in Mumbai is served by a city-wide network of carriers known as *dabbawalas* who work to provide lunches to the employees in offices. For further reading, see Stefan Thomke's "Mumbai's Model of Service Excellence", from November 2012 issue, Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org//mumbais-model-of-service-excellence>

⁴ The *Kawaii* culture in Japan refers to people, items, animals, even anime and *manga* characters that represent cuteness. It has in fact become a marker of Japanese aesthetics where cuteness is preferred over sophistication or beauty. Harajuku city is known for its abundance of *kawaii* merchandise and fashion which is popular mostly among the youth. To the other parts of the world, *kawaii* is nearly synonymous with Japan. There are many different types of *kawaii* ranging from ugly and grotesque, to dreamy and sexy. *Kawaii* is also used to bring focus upon taboo topics such as depression and suicide in Japan (*yami kawaii*).

⁵ While title of the film uses the more Anglicized 'papa' to refer to the father, it uses *obentō* to refer to the lunchbox. *O~* and *go~* prefixes are part of Japanese honorific language and are used to sound more polite and formal. The prefixes are generally used to show respect towards others, and also to refer to things that belong to or are being given to others. Here, the use of the term *obentō* instead of the casual *bentō* highlights Midori's association of the lunchbox with her father's personhood, thus deserving of the same respect reserved for her father.

⁶ During Ila's visit to her mother before her father's death, her mother claims that if her son was alive she would not have to worry about medical bills. The grief of the loss of her son, coupled with her vapid life of caring for her ailing husband, has further estranged her from her daughter, thus making way for Mrs. Deshpande to fill the vacuum.

⁷ Although outside the scope of this paper, the influence of *rasa* theory on Bollywood could also provide another layer of symbolic cannibalism, both within the narrative of the films as well as with the audience. Bharata uses the metaphor of food in explicating the relish of the Dominant States in the minds of the spectator of the play (*sahrdaya*), experienced through the help of gestures performed on stage. Following the various relationships explicated in the films, the audience may experience the arousal of *rasa* by virtue of their identification with characters, enacting a different communication between cinema and its viewers.

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“Make her. Do the needful”: A Comparative reading of the language of corporeality in selected short stories of Mahasweta Devi

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Abstract:

The works of radical Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi use the subaltern as gendered-subject in an unprecedented manner in her stories. In portraying the treatment of women as objects of fetishization in her works, she intends to expose the farce that decolonization has meant for the indigenous communities of India. In her own words, “Decolonization has not reached the poor... Women are just merchandise, commodities”. This de-feminizing on her part is particularly reflected in the unornamental and non-poetic language that she uses in her writing and blends it with a deep sensitivity in representing human relationships that form the crux of all her narratives. I have selected two short stories that interrogate the grassroots social ideas of chastity of the woman’s body and the consequences of sexual violation or rape which have been eternally associated with the female body. Hence, the primary thesis of my paper is to analyse the theme of corporeality in two of Mahasweta Devi’s short stories, ‘Draupadi’ (1978) and ‘Dhowli’ (1979) respectively. While both works will be read in their translated versions for fluidity of comparison, I shall attempt a reading of the original Bengali texts in order to get a better grasp of Mahasweta’s ‘interventionist practice’ of disrupting conventional mainstream language.

Keywords: Subaltern, Corporeality, Postcolonial Resistance, Language, Sexual violence.

I

The fact that Mahasweta Devi, the radical Indian-Bengali writer, structured most of her fictional narratives around tribulations of tribal lives in India, particularly tribal women, has often earned her the designation of being a ‘feminist’; a label she refused attaching to herself: “I write as a writer...not as a woman” (Katyal 16). She asserted time and again, that she captures the oppression of a collective ‘subaltern’ community, of which the woman is an integral part. She identifies the problems of subaltern women to be unique but prefers not to view the woman as a separate entity from the larger community. It goes without saying that

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Mahasweta Devi uses the subaltern as gendered-subject in an unprecedented manner in her stories. In portraying the treatment of women as objects of fetishization in her works, she intends to expose the farce that decolonization has meant for the indigenous communities of India. In her own words, “Decolonization has not reached the poor. This is why these things happen. Women are just merchandise, commodities” (Mahasweta Devi xx)

This de-feminizing on her part is particularly reflected in the unornamental and non-poetic language that she uses in her writing and blends it with a deep sensitivity in representing human relationships that form the crux of all her narratives. I have selected two particular short stories which interrogate the grassroots social ideas of chastity of the woman’s body and the consequences of sexual violation or rape which have been eternally associated with the female body. Hence, the primary thesis of my paper is to analyse the theme of corporeality in two of Mahasweta Devi’s short stories, ‘Draupadi’ (1978) and ‘Dhowli’ (1979) respectively. While both works will be read in their translated versions for fluidity of comparison, I shall attempt a reading of the original Bengali texts in order to get a better grasp of Mahasweta’s ‘interventionist practice’ of disrupting conventional mainstream language.

For the sake of clarity, the paper is divided into two sections. The first section will examine the rhetoric of rape in each of the texts, where the female body eventually becomes the site of her defiant resistance against sexual exploitation. The complex relationship between men and women that Mahasweta captures in her narratives is a dynamic power-struggle, which unsettles and vitiates both, while the latter who is more oppressed than the former marks her triumphant subaltern agency in the greater order of things. The second section is dedicated to Mahasweta’s usage of a distinct lexicon in the native language; a language rooted in local culture and visceral enough to never let the reader forget about the primitiveness of the setting and the miserable conditions of its people. I read such social and linguistic resistance as a form of ‘affirmative sabotage’ (Spivak) executed by the gendered subaltern.

Spivak’s idea of the ‘sexual differential’ is similar to Ranajit Guha’s stratification of the subaltern existing on the plane of ‘identity-in-differential’ (the equation goes something like: Total Indian population minus the dominant indigenous/upper class elite = subaltern

people). Sexual differential therefore is, the realisation of what makes a woman different from a man is, essentially, her sexuality and the aspects of its perception in society. This realisation then shapes her social, economic and political subjectivity as well as her relations with the community, and the nation-state in general. We shall also see, how much of this theorisation does Mahasweta's stories advocate or subvert, during the course of textual analysis. Reading the above two sections consecutively, while keeping the idea of negotiating sexual differential in mind, would facilitate our understanding of how Mahasweta's perspective and rhetorical engagement weaves a 'counter-discourse' in the face of dominant ideologies of exploitation and gendered subalternity.

II

The 'Other's' Corporeality as a Threat To The Center

Critical scholar Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, in her seminal work, *Real and Imagined Women*, discusses how in the histories of postcolonial developing countries, discourses of gender inequities, gender oppressions and caste-based discriminations are in constant conflict with the State (7). In Indian history, this violent confrontation is most visibly seen in the government's conflict with the tribal population of India. These dispossessed people mostly comprised of the victims of perpetual feudal-capital oppression – bonded labours, landless peasants- are further relegated to the background by being deprived of the rights of citizenship. Even though the tribals (Scheduled Tribes) comprise 8.6% of India's population (according to the 2011 census), the State fails to secure them with basic means of survival, which is land, food and education. Sunder Rajan asserts that when the hegemonic domination fails accomplishment by means of 'politico-ideological control', the oppressive State resorts to means of violence (5). A major share of this violence translates into sexual violence when confronting women resisters. It is from this 'oppressed space' that Mahasweta Devi writes her stories.

The Naxalbari uprising of 1967 was one such political struggle ignited by the landless peasants against the dominant landlords and moneylenders in parts of West Bengal and Bihar. Several anti-Naxalite operations were launched by the government to suppress the rebellion,

which resulted in third-degree tortures and merciless killings of tribal folks. Mahasweta locates her story 'Draupadi' in such a charged atmosphere—in the year 1971, after the failure of Operation Bakuli, in which the main culprits, Dopdi (a Santal variation of the name 'Draupadi') and her husband Dulna, a Santal rebel-couple, hoodwinked the army by faking their death and escaped into the Jharkhani forest of Jharkhand. To fast forward the story, in the present, Dulna has been tracked down and shot dead; now, apprehending Dopdi would be a significant step for this operation to be a success. It is at this climactic moment that the competent army chief, Senanayak is summoned to lead Operation Jharkhani. This man, Senanayak, whom Mahasweta introduces as the, "...specialist in combat and Left-politics" (Spivak 258), is the textbook exemplar of ideological imagination transitioning into material accomplishment. In Mahasweta's text thus, Draupadi and Senanayak, the man and the woman respectively, belong to two entirely different poles of ideology, belief and methods of combat.

From the very beginning, Mahasweta emphasizes on the corporeal aspects of warfare which are inherent both within Draupadi and Senanayak, albeit with separate methodologies. Whereas the army chief believes in combat by perceiving the Other's workings of the mind, "...in order to destroy the enemy, become one", Draupadi, and the Santal tribe in general are believed to be born warriors for generations, fighting with primitive weapons like the bow and arrow, hatchet and scythe (Spivak 259). But that does not let Senanayak look down upon them even once. In fact, he is quite explicitly shown to be nurturing a sense of respect for the enemy, at least ideologically. So much so that when Dopdi is finally caught and apprehended, Senanyak's act of instructing his soldiers to 'make her', that is torturing her physically in order to extract verbal confession, comes off as a moment of consternation for the reader. The plot is structured in such a way of progression that the fact of Sennanyak resorting to rape as a 'war strategy', barely finds favor with the readers, almost to the degree of being an un-militant strategy of combat and an act of cowardice. The audience gets an impression that a man of Senanayak's ideological capabilities deserves a better standing than being called an immoral facilitator of rape (he does not rape Dopdi himself, but lets his men do it, as the story indicates).

To counter the audience's impression, it is crucial to remember the historical legitimacy of sexual violence used by the Pakistani opponents in the Bangladesh Liberation War, as a strategic method of suppressing the freedom movement. That was the year 1971 and ironically, Mahasweta's story is also situated in the same year. She, therefore, makes the readers aware of how rape for the competent Senanayak is nothing more than a strategy of weakening or vitiating the enemy's willpower; it is not a feeder of his lust, but a corporeal destruction of the opponent. However, the author uses this very legitimacy of sexual violence to subvert the glorification of heteronormativity and *re-presents* a powerful rhetoric of retaliation by the gendered subject. In the forest, when Dopdi suspects of somebody following her, she is already in a state of anticipating her arrest and is coming to terms with the consequences that would follow: "When they counter you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed; your sex is a terrible wound" (263). The author portrays the subaltern woman as conscious of her sexuality (and hence 'sexual differential') and how that would serve towards her 'different treatment' in the hands of the police than the apprehensions of other Naxalite men.

Mahasweta's graphic description of Dopdi's raped body is imbued with a language of crudity. It is explicit, unsettling and visually disturbing. The description is a rewriting of the mythical Draupadi's 'disrobing' episode in the Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata*. Draupadi's honor was saved by Krishna's divine intervention whereas in this dark, apocalyptic world, nobody but the subaltern woman herself must emerge as her own 'saviour'. This is the message that Mahasweta Devi intends to convey and which Spivak articulates in her 'Foreword' to the story:

Mahasweta's story rewrites this episode. The men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi...Rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine comrade, the story insists that this is the place where male leadership stops (252).

When Dopdi is summoned the next morning to the army chief's tent, and asked to put on her clothes, she defies the orders and instead begins tearing her saree to pieces with her mouth. This cannibalistic behaviour and her mutilated 'black' body are horrific sights to behold for Senanayak and his soldiers. As the body approaches him, for the first time, as Mahasweta

writes, "...Senanayak is afraid to stand in front of an *unarmed target*. Terribly afraid" (269). Draupadi's derisive address of herself as the 'object of your search' is the point where she overcomes her sexual differential (Spivak 252) and subverts the traditional, heteronormative conventions of the shame of rape to be entirely associated with the woman's dignity and honor. On the contrary, the woman's raped body puts her perpetrators to shame and becomes the site of subaltern agency.

Written just a year after 'Draupadi', 'Dhowli' is a complex tale of caste-based economic and sexual exploitation of a community, in general and Dhowli the tribal woman, in particular. I regard the narration to be complex because here the terror of corporeal annihilation is subsumed within the rhetoric of romantic love. Alan Badiou in his fantastic philosophical insight on love writes that love is not merely an "exchange of mutual favors" but an "event of difference" which permeates through impenetrable areas of the world and leads to the idea of experiencing the world through difference (17). Dhowli, the Dusad widow (an untouchable tribal caste) is involved in a romantic liaison with the upper-caste Brahman boy Misrilal and is impregnated by him. The immense difference of social class is capitulated by Mahasweta's stern language, wherein she focuses on the idea that while the two lovers initially give in to the temptations of innocent love, disregarding their caste-class discrepancy, this relationship is short-lived. It is an illicit relationship that is not acceptable to anyone in the village, not even her own community. The consummation of Dhowli and Misrilal's love is a metaphor for bridging the worldly difference that Badiou states only true love is capable of censuring. The theme of love conflicting with materialism of the world as a result of social difference is pervasive in Mahasweta's stories. Thus, in this story, Dhowli's rape is not a literal one, because, as the villagers say "...she gave herself to him of her own accord" (Bardhan 198) and hence she is abolished to the 'periphery of the periphery'.

The author describes Dhowli's despair in relation to her body. From the initial consciousness of "her slender waist, budding breasts" being her enemy to the 'pain under her chest', to how the Brahmin men would eat off pieces from her body if seen alone, and the Dusad men waiting to attack her as soon as the Misra boy abandons her (189). Even the child in Dhowli's womb is constantly referred to as a 'thorn' by her own mother. Later when Misrilal returns to the village, Dhowli refers to herself as a 'corpse' (194). The careful usage

of selective words that in this work which exude a sense of corporeality more than a sense of spirit in this work, draws attention to the reproductive body of the subaltern which is a source of rampant sexual trafficking in India, implying its economic utility. The words construct a world where all human relationships are perceived in terms of the predator-prey equation and are legitimised by both the upper-caste due to their domineering superiority as well as the lower-caste for their economic and social powerlessness.

On the lines of maintaining the status quo, Dhowli offers her final resistance also through her body, in the face of severe adversities. It is her own choice to keep the baby in her womb, to not succumb to suicide as the villagers, her mother and Misrilal himself would suggest and her penultimate decision to use her body as a commodity to support herself and her family economically. In an exploitative arrangement such as this, Dhowli is expected to render her services through the capitalization of her body. By depicting prostitution as a post-modern form of transaction of labor and capital, Mahasweta foregrounds the perils of capitalism that glosses sexual exploitation as an extension of historical and feudal oppression of women. Kalpana Bardhan summarizes this historical continuity of exploitation very aptly:

In a stratified society, discrimination of wages and jobs/occupation by caste and sex is not a feudal remnant but perfectly consistent with the play of market forces (5).

The last blow on Dhowli's fate comes in the form of her ostracization from the village to the city of Dhanbad where she will be joining professional prostitutes and register herself officially as one of them. And yet Dhowli takes this blow with immense fortitude. Her interior monologue towards the end is an assertion of her agency where the practices of female reification in a capitalistic market are more acceptable to her than being exploited by the Brahmans of her village, both sexually and economically. For in that case, "...she would have been a whore individually, only in her private life. Now she is going to be a whore by occupation...a member of a part of a society" (205). Mahasweta's Marxist dimension as a writer emerges here, in delineating the gendered subaltern not just as a sexed-subject but also as an oppressed class-subject.

III

Linguistic Disruption of The Center in ‘Draupadi’ and ‘Dhowli’.

Mahasweta Devi was a twentieth century woman writer who derived the content of her works from real life. Having witnessed several cataclysmic events of Indian history and politics, such as the Partition in 1947, the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the onslaught of the Naxalite movement in 1967, it is the disenfranchisement of the tribal communities in the country that captured most of her attention. Being an investigative journalist apart from a writer and an activist, there is a unique interplay of social activism and literary writing in her works. And yet her literary writings are not literary in the true sense of the word; they are structured in the shape of a report and are always mediated by a language that is a bizarre blend of regional, national, and even international ideas as well as speech. Minoli Salgado in her critique of the politics of translating Mahasweta Devi’s works, comments:

Not only is the surface realism of her stories destabilized by mythic and satiric configurations, but the language used itself is unfixed, incorporating a mixture of folk dialects and urbane Bengali, slang and Shakespeare, Hindu mythology and quotations from Marx (132).

Such an eclectic use of sources in her language calls for a distinctive narrative style which we shall unpack in the two stories. However, one might be curious to know the reason behind the author bringing about such a linguistic disruption. The reason I find most palpable is that Mahasweta’s language intends to interrupt the flow of conventional reading. Clearly, the language employed in both ‘Draupadi’ and ‘Dhowli’ is not straightforward but rather a specific kind of linguistic construction intended to cause a rupture in ordinary lexicon. It is more grounded in reality of the native tribes, whom Mahasweta Devi characterizes as “suffering spectators of the India that is travelling towards the twenty first century” (*Imaginary Maps* xi). Having worked closely with the tribes in the interior parts, she identified the folk language being mixed with the urban style of speech and even English, the colonizer’s language, which the tribals have picked up in their interactions with the local government and travel to the cities. The inevitable contact of the rural population with modern civilization is implicated here.

Whereas 'Draupadi' is replete with instances of English words being used frequently instead of their Bengali equivalents, and where both languages are almost in a state of strife with each other, the unique amalgamation of Bengali and native Hindi dialect in 'Dhowli' drags the story closer to the reality of speech registers typical of the specific geography. Since 'Draupadi' is set in the Santal-occupied regions of Jharkhand and West Bengal, we find a mix of Santali dialect mixed with standard Bengali in the tribal's speech. This is also an indicator of the chasm which exists between the tribal population and the army (or the nationalist bourgeoisie), who have better access to English, the foreign language and hence use it in their everyday conversations. On the contrary, 'Dhowli' is situated in the interior parts of Ranchi, also known as the Palamu region. The native language in that area is Hindi, which is also the language that the Brahmin landlords use. Hence, we find the conversations in the text taking place in a multilingual manner but used unanimously by both the lower caste as well as the upper caste speakers. The reader's linguistic unsettlement while reading the stories is a metaphor for the existential crisis experienced by the tribal communities with respect to their native languages which are on the verge of extinction. The author's intention in bringing these multiple languages together and deploying them in the stories in order to highlight the wide cultural difference is nothing short of path-breaking:

Through the hybridity of English and Bengali, Mahasweta Devi is able to construct a piece that tells of the both the tribal people attempting to hold on to their traditions while a neo-colonizing force creates new narratives for India through physical and linguistic changes. (Andersen 122).

Language is the greatest expression of one's identity and such a mixed vernacular symbolizes a disrupted, confused and hyphenated existence that the tribal communities lead in postcolonial modern India.

Mahasweta's careful use of selective words, as mentioned before, comprise a major portion of her perceptions on social problems that exist in Indian society. It is therefore crucial to give specific attention to the usage of Bengali words that defy the traditional moral reasonings that was expected of a woman writer of her generation. Salman Rushdie thoughtfully says in one of his novels, *Shame* (1983) that in order to know a society fully, it is imperative to concentrate on its 'untranslatable words' (104). Mahasweta's works have been

a topic of interest globally now and have been translated into multiple languages by several translators. The translated versions which I have read are by Gayatri Spivak ('Draupadi') and Kalpana Bardhan ('Dhowli'); two well-known scholars who have done commendable jobs in retaining the rustic flavors of Mahasweta's original language while trying to fit them into a literary discourse of global readership.

In the first story, towards the end when Dopdi musters up courage and retorts back to Senanayak, when he that she be produced in front of him covering her body, "You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again?" (269), the Bengali word for 'strip' that Mahasweta uses is much more savage and visceral, which is '*langta*'- a word that is considered vulgar and hence is refrained from being used openly in a civilized Bengali society. But Mahasweta insists on using the outrageous word instead of its erudite Bengali equivalent which should be '*ullangha*' (naked). The two Bengali terms mean the same and yet one stands for the physical nakedness of the body whereas the other word, *langta*, implies every kind of violation of the civil code. The intent for the author to use the latter term is to attack the very perceptions of a civil society which invests the raped body with metaphors of shame, humiliation and violence. Similarly, in 'Dhowli', the moment of Dhowli's decision to descend into selling her body for survival is expressed in extremely crude language. She asks her first customer to bring money and corn by saying, "I am not selling on credit" (202). Bardhan makes the hard-hitting original statement ("*Jodi dukaan khuli toh daam nibo na?*") quite mellow in her translation. The literal translation of Mahasweta's language would have been, "if I open the shop, won't I take the price for it?", where the woman conceives of her body as a 'shop' or brothel in this case, meant for carrying out commercial exchanges.

IV

'Otherness' As A Counter-Discourse: Language & Sexuality

Mahasweta's strength as a writer derives much from her iconoclastic attitude towards an oppressive government that denies recognition to the tribal population as belonging to mainstream society. In her interview with Gabrielle Collu, she insists on the tribals being bestowed with a separate 'tribal identity' that shall be constitutive of a bigger 'indian'



nationality (148). Mahasweta reminds the readers in Spivak's foreword to her collection of short stories, *Imaginary Maps* (1995), how *The Ramayana* contains evidence of the indigenous tribes being the original dwellers of Indian soil much before the Aryan invasions happened (ix). Her mode of writing derives from the ancient history of India that boasts about an all-inclusive culture of humanity and thus, the writings scathingly critique the government's constant denial of the historical truth as well as a discourse of collective resistance that the oppressed tribals launch against that denial. Language plays a significant role for this purpose of collective resistance.

Language for Mahasweta, has a specific function of causing a deliberate rupture in the make-belief harmony of a standardized vernacular. When Eduoard Glissant, the renowned Martinican critic-theorist talks in his seminal work on colonialism, called *Discourse of Colonialism*, about how language should be used as a tool for identifying the ambiguities inherent in the subaltern's history, he means that to be the beginnings of constructing a situation where the imposed language must be used by the subaltern for his own self-expression, and which might result in the creation of a 'counter-poetics' against the colonizer in the near future (163). Mahasweta Devi's language, in a similar vein, attempts to penetrate the master's linguistic territory (the bourgeoisie or the colonizer), and twists it around to make it her own. The 'master' here is technically everyone who is in a state of opposition with the tribal communities of India, and not just the police or the feudal landlords who are just minor agents of a bigger colonial domination. Thus, it is not a coincidence that in the first short story, the only English word which Dopdi, an illiterate, learns in her perception of the army's ruthless treatment of the Naxalites, is *counter* (269), which is an abridged form of 'encounter'. It is an act of merciless 'shoot-at-sight' tactic used by the soldiers to eliminate the Naxalites and entails a climactic termination of the mobilization of the Naxal movement. Dopdi's husband, Dulna also had been a victim of the army's 'encounter' and thus the word means the end of everything for Dopdi Mejhén. Therefore, when she audaciously challenges Senanayak to 'counter' her (269), meaning to shoot and kill her, one is bound to wonder whether Dopdi knows the 'real' implication of the word, which is that she might not be alive anymore to challenge Senanayak's masculinity. Spivak re-articulates this confusion by asking, "What is it to 'use' a language 'correctly', without 'knowing' it"? (255). While

Dopdi might not know the latent danger in her courageous retort, Mahasweta certainly is well-aware of the articulation of the subaltern woman's resistance against the privileged man. Her use of language therefore can be read as an expression of subaltern 'counter-poetics'.

I read this interventionist method of forging a counter-poetics for the subaltern woman as a form of Mahasweta Devi's fictional 'affirmative sabotage', which Spivak describes as a 'gloss over the usual meaning of sabotage: that is the deliberate ruining of the master's machine from the inside', in one of Spivak's interviews with *New York Times* (2016). In other words, 'affirmative sabotage', for Spivak means entering the master's discourse that one is criticizing fully and using it to twist it around from the inside. The examples of such a deliberate problematization can be found in the two short stories that I have read in this paper. The strategy of using Dopdi's raped body as symbolic of asserting social power instead of the conventional rhetoric of male sexual desire, allows the author to "reconstitute... the female subject of rape" (Maan 136). Sunder Rajan points out the numerous ways of such a reconstitution:

"...by representing the raped woman as one who becomes a subject *through* rape rather than merely one subjected to its violation...by locating the raped woman in structures of oppression other than heterosexual 'romantic' relationships...and finally by counting the cost of rape for its victim in terms more complex than the extinction of female selfhood in death or silence" (76-7).

Rajan's re-definition of romantic relationships further leads us to wonder how Mahasweta Devi in all her fictions, abstains from romanticizing the subaltern woman and instead focuses on reading the woman's exploitation in relation to her caste and class. The impeccable research that she does for each of her literary works, enforces the idea that looking separately at the gender problem does not lead to any sort of resolution. On the contrary, subsuming the gender problem within the discourse of class and caste would magnify the systemic oppression that the tribal communities have been subjected to since a long time. This aspect becomes particularly visible in 'Dhowli', where the relationship between the privileged Brahmin landlords and the Dusad community of bonded labor is one of endless domination. Because Dhowli belongs to a lower caste as well as class than the Misra boy, it takes almost next to no time for the privileged class to oust her from the village. Mahasweta does not

dismiss the angle of romantic love altogether towards the end, in that she leaves the Misra boy's feelings for Dhowli to be alien for the readers. Her larger motive is to imply that it is the wide caste-class divide between the 'lovers' that would never let the reader de-code or even come close to decoding whether there ever existed any sort of genuine love between the two. In such a de-sentimentalized depiction, it would not be an exaggeration perhaps to call Mahasweta a hyper-realist author, one who is striving to design a counter-discourse of radical resistance and for whom even an iota of romanticism could prove detrimental to this design, by dragging the reader into an idyllic setting.

In all of Mahasweta Devi's fictions and particularly in the two short stories that I have considered here, there is a very explicit foregrounding of corporeality in describing the constitution of the subaltern woman, her 'displaced space' of existence and the ways of resistance that she can offer from that space. We might call it the author's counter-sentence, counter-discourse or counter-poetics, but the purpose of all these concept-metaphors remains the same: the gendered subaltern making her insurgent presence felt within the hegemonic discourse. It is Dopdi's and Dhowli's 'affirmative sabotage', that punctures the masculinist ideology of invading the female body as a means of crushing the woman's agency. And therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Mahasweta Devi executes this task by means of her corporeal language.

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**Worldliness as Key to the Singularity of Literature:
Questioning the General-Particular Framework of Literary Categories**

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Abstract:

Beginning with the premise that the event of literature hosts the phenomenon of world-becoming, the paper seeks to understand the ontological nature of worldliness. Such an attempt is an unpacking of the subject-object binary and a fluidization of the reader's self in relation to the otherness that she/he confronts. Taking cue from Heidegger, Nietzsche and Deleuze, an understanding of worldliness translates to understanding repetition that serves as the key in coming to terms with the singularity of literature. Thereafter, the paper tries to examine literary categories and how they consequently impair the cognizance of this individuating potential of literary works, in turn falling prey to subterranean hegemonic forces. Finally, a critical evaluation of World Literature as an extreme and somewhat problematic form of general category is analysed and contrasted with the potential of Comparative Literature in responding to plurality and otherness that are ground conditions to let the world become.

Keywords: Worldliness, Singularity of Literature, Repetition, Literary Categories, World Literature

Literature as the Event of World-Becoming

That which distinguishes our engagement with literature or any work of art for that matter, from other things, is the fact that the former is characterized by a sense of happening. This however, does not tantamount to saying, that our coming into contact with other things in the world is bereft of any happening whatsoever. Yet, these latter happenings are neutralized by the very functionality by dint of which these things come together to constitute our everyday life. Using a hammer to put a nail on the wooden plank or pouring water from a jug to a glass are such commonplace instances, where the happening is hardly taken notice of. In fact, as Heidegger points out in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art", the equipmentality of a

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thing is predicated upon its ability to dissolve itself in the act in which it finds its use (“Poetry, Language, Thought” 45).

Nevertheless, a work of literature does persist as a thing. On one hand, this is substantiated by the material that constitutes it, and on the other, a certain resistance, a distinct impenetrability that is met with in reading. Unlike other ‘practical’ things however, the thing that literature is, is characterized not by usefulness whereby its materiality is subsumed to utility. Rather, it is the happening itself that is called to being in reading that serves as the *raison d’être* of literature. A work of literature is thus a thing, whose thingly feature “belongs admittedly in the work-being of the work, it must be conceived by way of the work’s workly nature. If this is so, then the road towards the determination of thingly reality of the work leads not from thing to work but from work to thing” (38).

What is meant here by the workly nature of the work? It must be that which makes the work a work. Since, the work is indistinguishable from the event that happens in our engagement with it, this nature is by no means a stable, general, metaphysically derivable element. On the contrary, such a nature is dynamic and inseparable from the event in which it occurs. There is no end to the possibilities that a literary work can bear. Reading a work can elicit pleasure, sorrow, curiosity so long the reader is capable of naming that what the work bears for him. But it is a futile exercise in Nominalism, for any literary work does not evoke a medley of distinctly identifiable emotions and responses, rather serves a new horizon where the things and people whom we had hitherto known appears in a new light. The event of literature invokes a totality, not one that can be envisaged as a distinct summation of things, but the absolute identification of the appearance with the act of making appear. If we are to find one word for what appears in a work of art, it must be something that always eludes our desire for encapsulating it within a framework, and at the same time, it must be that which can only appear in becoming. We call this elusive something the world, and the workly nature of the literary work subsists in worldliness.

And yet, do we not protract our understanding of the world to a general idea? We seem to be sure what the world is and what it means, and armed with this certitude, we approach a literary work as a particular manifestation of this general notion. We speak of World Literature in a sense that literature belongs to the world before it is read. The world is granted an unquestioned priority, and literature as its myriad messengers. Our faith in this

undisputed primacy of the world is supported by that epistemology that categorically describes the world to us through channels like media, trivia, clichés and the archives, information and circulation that are to be found in disciplines such as culture study, sociology, history and so on. Instead of according literature as the sole ground where its meaning seeks to be produced, we extrapolate a work to clusters of stable knowledge-systems, and understand its significance as being represented and derived from the offshoots of such epistemic nexus. Such a tendency is re-iterated in the acts of grouping literature according to periods, culture, categories of class and gender. The event of literature is relegated to a space outside of the work and preceding it. We associate this space with the demarcation of being a social or cultural space.

Such an epistemological supremacy is argued, among many others, by Heidegger, who traces its tradition back to the era of Humanism in Europe. In his essay on the critique of Cartesian philosophy “The Age of World Picture”, he explicates humanism as that which “designates the philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates whatever is, in its entirety, from the standpoint of man and in relation to man” (“The Question concerning Technology” 131). This stability of reference of all knowledge with respect to man could be obtained at the price of proscribing and circumscribing what is meant to be human. Once being-human could be framed in tenets, the certitude of representation could be achieved. The consequences of such a historical phenomenon were on one hand the rise of the encyclopedia as the repository of all there is to know about the world, and using Humanism as a ‘tool’ to civilize those who apparently fell outside its boundaries, namely the ‘natives’ in the colonies. The abuse, or misdirection, of Cartesian reason continued way long till knowledge became synonymous with factuality. We are the successors of this trend who prolong its movement every time we assume the world as a completed entity of inert facts and the work of art as merely a new combination of these facts.

Yet, that which is ontically closest is ontologically farthest, says Heidegger in a ponderous moment in *Being and Time* (69). If the world is that which becomes in the engagement with the literary work, it has no factual primacy. This equals in refuting the very notion of the world as a compound of facts. It is rather in this shift from the medley of facts towards understanding where one comes to be, that constitutes worldliness. “The where-in of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself is that for which one lets entities be

encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this 'wherein' is the phenomenon of the world. And the structure of that-to-which [*worauf hin*] Dasein assigns itself is what makes up the worldhood of the world" (119). The world, thus, does not exist as a fact does, but can only become. Art, by defamiliarizing itself from everydayness, makes the appearance of the world possible.

The defamiliarization that is at work in literature is not a new combination of facts derived from a general stratum, but a new way of seeing things. If that is so, the notion of a stable human subject can no longer hold, for if we come to look at things in a new light, we are no longer the same as we were before. Here lies the full force of literature's productivity. Unlike the productivity of a machine that produces individual specimens according to varying needs from a general pattern, literature produces the possibility of becoming new. We can no longer subscribe to the general-particular logic, despite the fact that the work of art indeed is individual. But that is not all. The Essence of Art, as Deleuze rightly points out, lies not just in it being individual but in its individuating potential. Essence constitutes subjectivity ("Proust and Signs", 43). The event of literature is world-becoming because our horizons undergo change. What brings about this widening of horizon? Not just the work of art as something individual, but the event, the workly nature that we mentioned before, that is unconcealed by the "projective binding of oneself" ("Essence of Truth" 45). The world is the 'that' which this binding seeks. It is a correlate of this binding and bound to the act of projection which is creative by nature [*Entwurf*].

Reading, understood in this sense, is essentially a creative act. It not only creates that which appears to us in a work but is the ground of an event where a distinct relation evolves; a relation that we resolve as existing between the self and the world, but one that is always prior to any such polarization. Reading, in this sense, does not create new knowledge, but new ways of understanding, new ways of being in the world. This shifts literature from a purely epistemological ground to an ontological concern. The work as a thing is material, but our engagement with it transcends its materiality. This does not mean that meaning of a work is abstracted from its body, but that the body itself presents us an occasion of discovery, a discovery of the self and the world, if one wishes to maintain such a distinction. The subject matter of a work therefore no longer pertains to something that is hermetically sealed, 'contained' within the work that one may unearth with one's subjectivity. Rather, the subject

matter points to that which is arrived at inculcating the cost of the erasure of that self-sure entity which we had imagined ourselves to be until that moment. This is the transcendence that appears strange because it is at once empirical; occasioned by an aesthetic process that but serves as a point of departure. We call this phenomenon transcendence because the reader undergoes a change while reading that is not bound or determinable by what is read. And this is what makes us see the hermeneutic, and not hitherto considered hermetic nature of the act of reading. Interpretation is creation; it is the in-betweenness situated in relation to what is read and what is understood, in other words, what happens or comes-to-be, for understanding is the structure of Dasein, as Heidegger shows. “What appears paradoxical—namely, that the subject matter is simultaneously shaped by the register and yet taken for something independent of it— is due to the liminal space that is opened up by interpretation itself” (Iser 60). This in-betweenness of the act of reading as a movement towards a new way to be in the world, is liminal, because it serves as a passage from one state to another. If we are to look at the space of literature, we cannot seek it in so-called already-defined socio-cultural space, but in a realm where we and the world become.

Worldliness as Repetition, Repetition as Singularity

In which direction should we then proceed in order to better understand the phenomenon of worldliness that is infinitely repeated in our engagement with literature? The clue to this, if not the secret that could once and for all be disclosed but at least the promise that could lead us to a less fabricated path, lies in the askance itself. We must seek to understand the nature of repetition, for it is the mode through which the world appears in literature. Most certainly, this repetition is not the conventionally understood re-appearance of the identical, for then all works of art would evoke worlds similar to one another and generality could be conserved. On the contrary, the very fact that we say the world is infinitely repeated in literature, and that the world is that which becomes or that to which our projection seeks to bind itself, precludes it from being an identity.

Deleuze asks a fundamental question that is relevant to our present discussion of world-becoming as repetition. “What is the being of that which becomes, of that which neither starts nor finishes becoming? Returning is the being of that which becomes”

(“Nietzsche and Philosophy”, 48). If the world returns eternally, it does mean that it is the recurrence of the identical over and over again. The notion of Eternal Return had indeed been so conceived as an inescapable loop of time by pre-Socratic philosophers who looked at it as the subjugation of becoming to pre-determination of fate (29). In his caustic attack at metaphysics, Nietzsche gives a radical turn to the understanding of Eternal Return as a principle of synthesis of forces. All becomings occur by the gathering of intensities passing through differences. What then directs these forces? Nietzsche calls it the will-to-power. The forces by themselves would be erratic and would come to mean nothing unique, unless it is channelized by a potential that provides with a peculiar gradient to move about. This potential, or will, is a complement of the forces themselves and not anthropomorphic. It is the internal, differential and genetic element of its production. “It does not let itself be delegated or alienated to another subject, even to force” (49).

But why does then Nietzsche call this a return or repetition? This is because the forces by themselves are indeed intensities and unperceivable. Only when they are driven by the will do they appear as creative. Every becoming is the return of forces to the realm of creation, and this return is eternal for becoming is without beginning or end. In his magnum opus *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze says,

repetition is being, but only the being of becoming. The eternal return does not bring back the same but returning constitutes the only same of that which becomes. Returning is the becoming identical of becoming itself. Returning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power; the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turn around the different. Such an identity, produced by difference, is determined as ‘repetition. (41)

The world as that which becomes in literature is a repetition of forces to the realm of creation. And in this regard, the worldliness of literature becomes a key to understanding its singularity. There is no one world out there somewhere that is permuted by art into individual combinations. Neither are there multiple worlds without any a center, as Deconstruction Theory suggests. For it remains undeniable, that every appearance in literature is that of the world. The definite pronoun before the word world here does not indicate a conceptual generality, but the other face of singularity, which is universality. “We

are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than a world or of worlds” (Goodman 3). The universe, being only that which comes to be interpreted and described, is singular in this respect. And this singularity can neither be approached by objectivism, a faith that the world already exists prior to description, nor subjectivism that reifies the world to the self’s imagination. It must be addressed outside this much debated binary, for the contention between the Realists and Nominalists that Eagleton alludes to, works under a completely different paradigm where ontology is not granted a central status (1-18).

Universality differs from generality in the condition of absence of genus. If the world was a general concept, then it must have been part of a subset of another group of a higher order. However, as Markus Gabriel ironically points out, the world being a super-object, as in an object containing all objects, cannot exist. It would not be possible to perceive a super-object simply because the perception of it would also have to belong to it. This goes on to confirm that the world cannot be conceptualized in a subject-object binary, but can appear only as singularity where perceiver and perceived exist undifferentiated in perception and becoming. Hence, Markus’ statement, “although the world does not exist, there do exist infinitely many worlds” (65). The singularity of literature implies that the world is repeated infinitely without ever being present as something whole, definite and conclusive.

“Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities” (“Difference” 1). Deleuze elucidates this with the example of festivals. Every celebration of a festival is the only occasion where it happens, and yet the festival as itself cannot ever occur. Likewise, literature occasions the appearance of the world, without ever giving us the world in itself. The notion of the possibility of the world existing as itself is an exigency born out of perception, and has no essential primordality. The transcendental idealism of Kant divides the universe into the noumenal and phenomenal realms because all aesthetic phenomena are contingent and evoke in the subject the feeling of confronting something partial. And yet this feeling of incompleteness is an ineradicable element in the totality of world-becoming. The world has therefore no noumenal existence, but only phenomenal vestiges of it could be arrived at. Whatever is noumenal about the world is contained in its phenomenality. Due to this paradox, the sense of the becoming of the world

is co-existent with the world holding itself back, for the world, unlike an equipment, does not allow itself to be entirely subsumed to use or function.

Thus, for example, a book chosen from a rack labelled African Literature in a bookstore has the possibility of making appear to us the African way of life only to the extent in which the world appears in our engagement with it. This picture or ethos is inextricably bound with the work and our binding with it. And precisely thus do we have the impression that that which is repeated also hides in the repetition as much as it is revealed in it. Unlike encyclopedic knowledge, literature gives us only that which we wrench out of it and ourselves. It tells us what it tells, and holds back that which it does not tell in the telling. To quote Deleuze in this juncture, “repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself- There is therefore nothing repeated which may be isolated or abstracted from the repetition in which it was formed, but in which it is also hidden” (17). On one hand, this makes us desist from framing literatures from Africa, our example in hand, into the epistemic molds provided by knowledge-systems. At the same time, it leaves a certain space open to interpretations, in fact beyond interpretations. Literature then shall no longer be looked upon as a representative of a continent, meaning all that the continent is associated with in common opinion and by knowledge archived about it. Rather, literature from Africa, or from wherever and whenever, would be an invitation to take part in an event, a becoming where the world has the possibility of becoming itself. This becoming-itself, that is, the world becoming world, is not representation of something already there. Instead of holding up a demonstration of the African way of life, the event would contribute to a fresh understanding of what it means to be ‘there’; if at all we are to collate this ‘there’ with Africa, it would be an Africa that does not yet exist but brought for the first time to existence by the work. “Because repetition differs in kind from representation, the repeated cannot be represented: rather, it must always be signified, masked by what signifies it, itself masking what it signifies” (18). Thus, repetition is possible only through difference, and not identity. The world that appears in a literary work from Africa is not a representation of African life as already known to us as readers, but a unique internal difference that sets it apart. The infinite repetition of the world in literature can now finally be understood as not being the re-occurrence of some identity, but generation of difference without concept (13).

Ontological Problems concerning Categorization

There seems to exist a great discrepancy of a fundamental nature between the fashioning of literature and its reception, appreciation, and circulation in academia. Our life in these technologically-driven times is by and large distributed in myriad pockets of existence, deliberately cut off from one another. In an epoch where functionality of things exclusively determines our interaction with them, knowledge too has not been able to escape from such a tide of unabashed pragmatism. Our way of seeing things, literature included, has as a result, been somewhat impaired by our proclivity for categorizations. Neatly divided categories serve as stable knowledge-systems whereby understanding is domesticated to behave merely as an exchange and manipulation of information. Even when the content of a literary work is apparently and overtly subversive in relation to a protest or counter-response against an already naturalized socio-cultural category like say class or race, it is soon blended in into a discursive pattern, entailing, if even not intentionally, the neutralization of that very same content.

A work of art, on the other hand, and literature especially due to its verbal roots in the very language that is spoken and lived, is by nature something that contests the very idea and validity of an essential core. Instead of subscribing to categories that are available as calcified and circumscribed zones of human experiences, a literary work is without reservation in embracing anything and everything that it deems fit for its self-expression.

The plurality in literature can only be understood in relation to the plurality in human life. Other than space-time-milieu, several perspectives, conditions, ideals, languages, faith and cultures get implicated at the construction of such plurality, and no matter in which language in whichever corner of the world, it acquires form through the interaction between uniqueness and universalization. (Chanda 46)

While a category encountered in the curriculum of a course in Literature, say for example British Romantic poetry, has as its point of departure as well as regulating principle an idea that has been accepted as something general and demarcated in space-time, literature becomes art only when it does not abide by the deterministic limits of such zones stipulated by conventional discourse. As mentioned already, worldliness as the projection of the reader

or even the writer is an act that is not teleological, for it is this projection itself that co-forms the world in its becoming. This projection is not a random manipulation of things, but a certain bringing together of elements that have been divorced from one another by the very course of human civilization in its zeal for compartmentalization. It is in this sense that Deleuze understands literature as a complication where the past appears not as that which had been once present, but in the very pastness of past, in the very possibility of it having been a fused state yet to be abstracted in analytical compartments (“Proust and Signs”, 30).

If the appearance of the world in our engagement of literature necessitates an openness on our part to allow that aforementioned ‘projective binding of oneself’ to take place, categorizations of literature in the academic quarters do run the risk of interfering, even impeding, with this phenomenon. It goes without saying that a structure is necessary in a disciplinary set-up and it can most certainly be never done away with. However, being conscious and alert about its possible adverse consequences would in my opinion be of paramount importance if we are to save literature from the clutches of the ongoing trend of pragmatism. For example, we approach the poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor from the vantage point of the Negritude movement. At first, we equip ourselves with the knowledge of what this movement had all been about, and then in reading the poetry, try to compare, if not fit, our experience with the expectation born out of this knowledge. Senghor’s poems come to be judged in light of the movement, as if it bore an obligation to behave as a faithful representative of its ethos. Many critiques have thus rightly criticized this poet for being gnostic, regressive, nativist and not being enough aware of the economic aspects of the colonial enterprise. Perhaps such a critique is not mistaken, but it is certainly a failure or a misunderstanding on the part of the critic if his judgement of Senghor’s poetry is based exclusively on that which is outside of it. What it entails is a disregard for what another human being is. It eventually culminates in a certain demand that we expect the other to conform with. We encounter a somewhat similar problem trying to grapple the genius of Flaubert in light of the category of European Realism. Having such a general, homogenized, monolithic datum as our reference, our reading is crisscrossed by our efforts of looking for convergences and divergences of the work in relation to a paradigm. We are anesthetized to the extent, that we tend to forget that a literary work is supposed to be not merely as an individual specimen of a family, but an individuating force. Instead of taking shelter under

the canopy of a general, inorganic idea, the work in its potential for individuation creates its own paradigm. Categorizations, in their basic distributions, evince a certain disregard neighbor blindness for this nascent, productive aspect of literature.

The singularity of worldliness precludes the possibility of it belonging to a general structure. If the world is that which becomes, the sense of it is accompanied simultaneously by the field in which this sense is presently. Unlike an advertisement that can achieve the same purpose through different fields of expressions such a newspaper, television, radio or the internet, the world as it appears to us in the engagement with a book, film or a sculpture cannot be divorced from the field in which it is occasioned. For literature as for other art forms, the field of sense cannot have any autonomous existence independent of the sense it carries. We can now understand the futility of a general literary category wishing to serve as field of sense for a work categorized within its corpus as an individual manifestation of it. World-becoming in literature is participation in the very process of sense without the aid of any reference 'external' to it. "The meaning of art is that it makes us confront sense" (Gabriel 185).

What consequences would such an awareness have for us as reader? Instead of remaining the same individuals, 'subjectively' dissecting a plethora of expressions coming to us from other human beings, an attitude of openness would involve a very sacrifice of such a conservative and conserved self. Projective binding of oneself in the event of world-becoming would allow us finally to stop persisting in the frantic effort of trying to arrange everything according to how we had always seen things. Borrowing the words of Alain de Botton, a genuine homage to an artist (and therefore art) "would be to look at our world through his eyes, not look at his world through our eyes" (213). Given that all categories are products of a conventionalized outlook, their boundaries may restrict from acquiring a new vision in reading, from entering into a new relation with the other where it is no longer held as something isolated or isolable from the self, from entering into the sharedness of an inter-subjective space by the dissolution of general prejudices and proclivities. The world appears only when one is open to change, open to becoming new, without which the world remains concealed in the everydayness and averageness of mundanity. This does not imply art cannot happen amidst that which is mundane, but since art is always an emergence, one that materializes that which is absent, it must, in order to become, wrench for itself a new

perspective. Art gives us the world only on the condition of us giving ourselves up to its tension. In the words of Proust, “through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own...Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists” (254).

Taking certain categories too close to heart can lead to self-defeating consequences. It is in vogue to approach literary works under clusters of say post-colonial or Dalit studies. Undoubtedly, such a category is constructed with the purpose of allowing certain voices to assert themselves, those which had been suppressed hitherto by exploitative and dominating forces. But does not such a general rubric constrain their expressions? Do we not inspect these works under the straightjacketed perspective of a single parameter where other dimensions, even when acknowledged, are seen as manifestations of a general condition? If we are to allot space for the world to become in each of these works, how can we still persist in approaching them from a definite vantage? If colonization and racial discrimination had made the lives of their subjects narrow by canceling out possibilities of self-becoming, do not these discursive practices of ours enact the same attitude, albeit reversed, that these voices are to be perceived as representatives of some faction? Undermining the singularity of a literary work entails in these situations a continuity of the same hegemony that they attempt to subvert by expressing themselves beyond the narrow confines of a single rhetoric, bringing forth life in its most diverse coloration? Interpreting a work according to a set paradigm of oppositional discourse inculcates the following problem summed up tersely by Iser:

a great many of them use the very procedures developed by the hegemonic discourse; indeed, they have to do so in order to achieve the persuasiveness necessary to advance the group interest. Borrowing from the discourses they seek to subvert can turn out to be a structural handicap: in trying to gain validity for their objectives, they develop a frame of reference that, in the final analysis, is not far from being logocentric itself, because a certain rationality is required if an agenda is to be accepted. Logocentrism, however, is the hallmark of the hegemonic discourse, which, though dismantled by deconstruction and thus giving the green light to the rise of oppositional

discourses, makes these latter discourses indirectly dependent on what they intend to discard. (4)

It should come to us as no wonder that great literary works resist such categorizations from within, for their subversion is not aimed against this or that particular repressive apparatus but the very inhumanity that consists in restricting fellow human beings from attaining their potential and living freely. 'Post-colonial novels' like Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* or Ahmadou Kourouma's *The Suns of Independence* critique the reduction of human life according to the precolonial-postcolonial binary by giving us a glimpse of human problems and joys that are impossible to be empathized with through any such general formula. Similarly, it is well nigh impossible to participate in the happenings of Manoranjan Byapari's first novel *Batase Barudher Gandho* if one is adamant to interpret it from the perspective of a Dalit background, for the question of class, if there at all, appears not overtly but in a complication with aspects outside of its parametrical confines. To say Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is 'more African' than Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* would be a practice in fundamentalism, as if the African novel is a race towards perfecting the representation of something concrete and given. Both the works event the world in a certain way, and each has its own historical significance. Once we accept this, Achebe's critique of Conrad appears no longer chauvinist in nature, but historical.

Not only does a concern towards literature's singularity prevent us from being beguiled into such above-mentioned identity politics, it can also avoid the risk of universalizing certain general features beyond their chronotopical field. How often do we not categorize some of Rabindranath's poetry as being Romantic, or the prose of Kamalkumar Majumdar as Modernist? In simplifying distinct historically situated trends as general adjectives, do we not in turn accept the European paradigm as absolute, transcendental even in respect to where and when it had taken place in Europe? The result is that instead of allowing the world of Rabindranath and Kamalkumar to open up in its own right, we distill their offerings into readymade containers. Such acts of universalization are acts of de-historicization, involving erasure of that which is locally unique in an expression. In these extrapolations, the universe is in most cases a Western paradigm masquerading as something neutral. And such formalization results in an unbridled channelizing of means to suit the purpose at hand without heed to any ends in mind, where Reason behaves merely as an

instrument for computing information according to an existing logic (Horkheimer 14-16). Universalization that bypasses singularity is therefore an act of eclipsing, and not disclosure.

The Case of World Literature

Perhaps the most extreme instance of categorization in literary studies have been that of World Literature. Here, a twofold generalization is at work. Firstly, World Literature as a category assumes upon itself an understanding of what the world actually is, before and independent of engagement with literatures. The world here is the factual world, the planet and its inhabitants taken de facto. Even if the collection of works arranged under World Literature remains undecided, the general idea supporting the category would continue to exist. Thus, as a category, World Literature is set in opposition to the understanding of the world as something that becomes. Secondly, it is also taken for granted that literature is a uniform phenomenon everywhere and at every time. That is to say, literariness, or that which makes a work a literary work is universalized. Needless to say, such a universalization too has a Western fulcrum, since the category itself had emerged in a culture where literature is taken for something that is written. Such an idea, though not explicitly stated, comes to bear a certain attitude of disregard or condescension towards all artistic productions verbal in nature but not necessarily in print. “But if literature comes to be understood differently everywhere in the world, the compound ‘World Literature’ amounts to no meaning at all” (Chanda 46). This is precisely the problem that was hinted with converting historical constructs to general adjectives, here in this case, enlarged to the widest possible limit.

Every category has a more or less distinct ground cut out for it. For example, Romanticism is associated with post Industrial Revolution, Modernism with post 1910 period, however puerile that might sound. The relevance of a category is, in this fashion, predicated by an area circumscribed by time and space, till it gets universalized by abstraction from its historical context. In this regard, what must be then the ground for World Literature? If World Literature is understood as literatures from the world, then it becomes a super-object like Markus Gabriel mentions in relation to the world being a set containing all sets. Surely, such a super set cannot be a set itself, for then it would contradict the condition of it containing all sets. The category of World Literature is, in this sense, self-contradictory

for it has no valency to exist due to lack of a ground that it could exclude to circumscribe its own identity.

And yet, World Literature as a category exists. It has its collection of texts 'from all over the globe'. Certainly then, there exists a principle of selection and exclusion. World Literature does not then mean simply all literatures of the world. A literary work has to 'qualify' to be a part of it. Although emerged at the times of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and Rabindranath's *Biswa-Sahitya* whose attempts were directed at a widening of horizon and break from parochialism, World Literature has, in the course of time, resulted at the canonization of certain selected works at the cost of peripheralizing all that was considered not significant enough.

The internal structure of the category is national or continental in character; a poem from Ghana, a play from China, a short story from South America and so on. No doubt such an endeavor is commendable. But is there not a problem lurking somewhere? History has witnessed the cruelly ironic phenomena of nation-building in the erstwhile colonies. Nation, as a category, is fraught with many contradictions that continue to haunt us till today. In a country like ours, the idea of a political nation still struggles to find one common factor on the basis of which it could unify all its citizens. And it is especially in situations such as this, that we can identify trends towards majoritarianism, attempts towards homogenization at the cost of excluding a minority. If such a problematic category such a nation is made to serve as the basis for World Literature curricula, would we not perpetuate the marginalization perpetrated by the state? It is but obvious that the voices that have already been silenced would hardly find place in such international constellations. And to make it worse, the literary work chosen from a nation would eventually come to be regarded as the representative of its culture. This has two possible consequences. Firstly, a handful of works surely cannot claim to represent the plurality of a complicated landscape. If that is so, the work begins to behave as an icon for a culture that perhaps in reality does not thrive as one culture at all but rather an interaction between different cultures and traditions. And secondly and more importantly, the very notion of a work being representational of a culture is undercut by the belief that the nation is an objective entity that can be described, whereas in reality, it is but a geopolitical construct grappling to domesticate plurality within a manageable, controllable scope.

It should appear clear by now that any categorization runs in contradiction with the singularity of literature. Categories, no matter what intention they represent, implicates a reduction of perspective and imagination, whereas to accord singularity its place, one must give oneself over to the irrational chaos of human expression that is pregnant with unforeseen possibilities. On the other hand, frameworks are necessary for study of literatures as well. If only these frameworks could be approached from the experience of texts towards overlaps, could there still be a possibility of according literature its productive potential; a literary history that proceeds not from categories, but from below (Dev 320-22).

If Comparative Literature is to act as an accomplice, a fellow traveler in such expeditions, what should it be? As long as it remains something that could be answerable by a ‘what?’, Comparative Literature would not be able to resist the many pitfalls of categorizations discussed so far. It is only from a shift from ‘what?’ to ‘how?’ can Becoming finally be given the centrality it requires to come about. This means, a shift from being a discipline to being a method. While the natural sciences can afford to apply a general method to various objects of enquiry, Gadamer argues that in the study of *Geisteswissenschaften*, “the theme and object of research are actually constituted by the motivation of the enquiry” (285). A shift towards method would not mean the use of a particular method, but to be sensitive to the singularity of literature, in that each work would, in our engagement with them, demand a certain perspective unique to the event of reading. Only by opening oneself to the possibility of coming to terms with the work’s field of sense does the world become as a singular sense, which is the condition for its appearance. Comparative Literature, as an approach open to possibilities emerging from readings, could unpack some of the problems associated with compartmentalizing categories. But could not every individual and institution achieve this? If so, why stress on Comparative Literature. Most certainly, such an attitude can be in theory practiced in every corner of academia and beyond, but it would be strenuous for a great transformation in outlook would be necessary. For Comparative Literature, this transformation would also no doubt be demanding, but it is already equipped with the potential towards such an outlook in its very definitions. If Comparative Literature is understood as an involvement of more than one entity and a coming to terms of self-identity always in relation to the other, it remains an open definition; not a definition at all in fact, but an openness towards plurality without subsuming the other to the self and a critical attack on

abstraction that tends to represent a thing as isolated and self-complete by itself (Chanda 23:20-25:30). Self and other would no longer be a stable boundary but a transcendently empirical condition of being in the world; empirical because encountered as something concrete, transcendental because its otherness is an inescapable condition. When the selfhood of the individual as well as the work is accorded a fluid status, then our engagement too would correspond attitude-wise to the productivity inherent in the literary phenomenon. Only by becoming poor by sacrificing all standard, textbook, categorical notions of the world, do we get it back, as it returns over and over, gleaming while holding itself back in becoming, hued in shades which would take more than an eternity to count.

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